



7 Novelettes and Shorts

ARGOSY

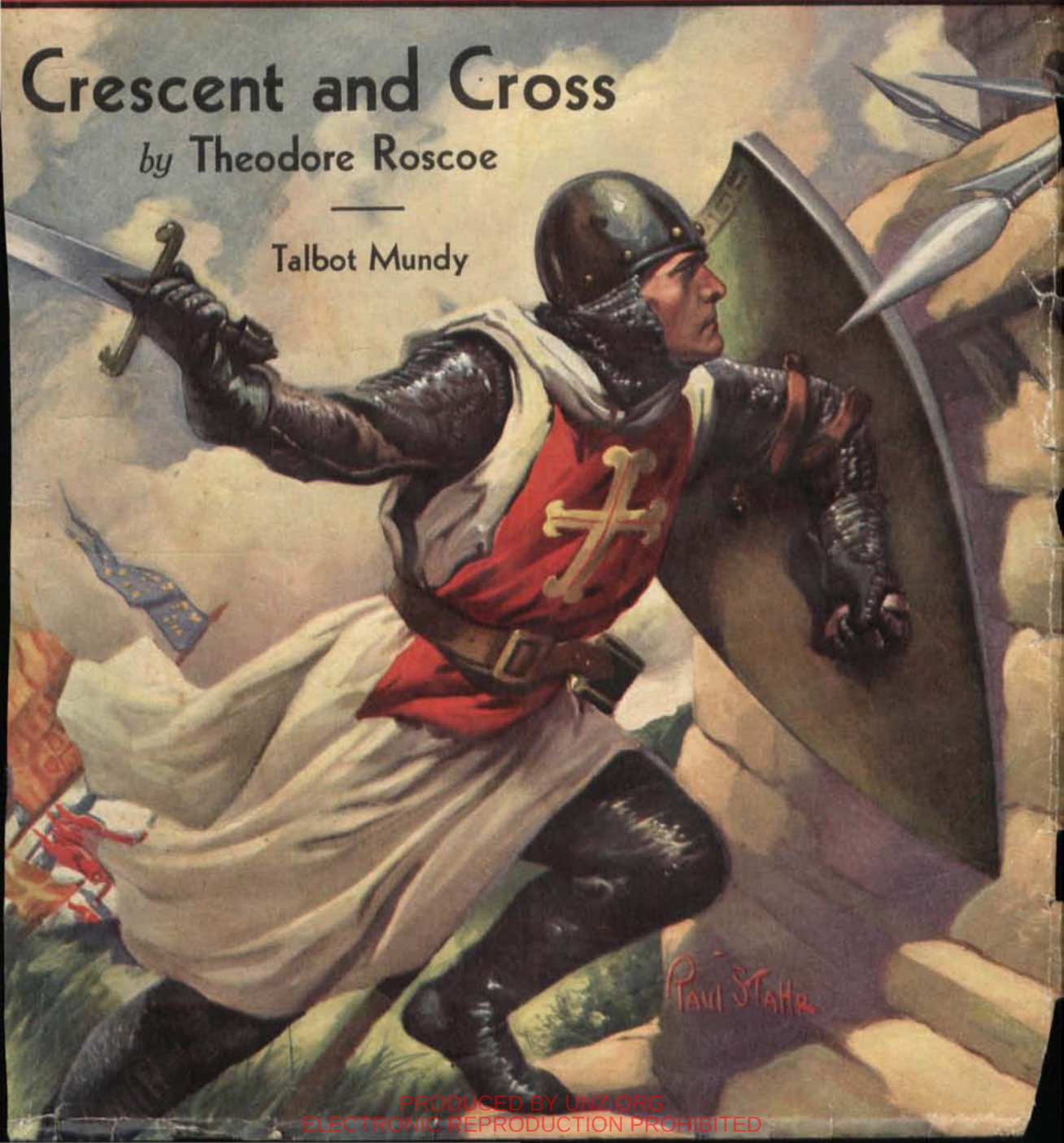
JUNE 17

WEEKLY

Crescent and Cross

by Theodore Roscoe

Talbot Mundy



We print
this ad for
MEN
at the
request of
1100
WOMEN



*How's
your breath
today?*

● The burden of their complaint is: "We're sick and tired of seeing nothing but women in your ads about bad breath. It isn't fair, because men are really the worst offenders. Why don't you quit picking on the women and write a few ads that will urge men to be more fastidious about their breath?"

When these requests, coming from dancing teachers, cashiers, club women and housewives, began to get over the thousand mark, we thought it about time to do something about it. This advertisement is the result.

How's your breath today?

Whether it is because men are too busy to take proper care of their mouth and teeth, or because they smoke more than women, or eat and drink unwisely, the fact remains that men are the worst offenders when it comes to halitosis (unpleasant breath).

Your common sense tells you that halitosis is the unforgivable fault in the business or social world. It is unforgivable because it is *inexcusable*.

The one way to make sure that your breath is beyond reproach is to gargle with Listerine every morning and night, and between times before meeting others. Don't waste your time and effort on questionable mouth washes with little or no deodorant effect. Tests show that Listerine instantly conquers mouth odors that ordinary antiseptics cannot hide in 12 hours. It attacks the source of odors (fermentation of tiny food particles in the mouth) and destroys the odors themselves. *Lambert Pharmacal Company.*

LISTERINE ENDS HALITOSIS—INSTANTLY ATTACKS ODORS ORDINARY MOUTH WASHES CANNOT HIDE IN 12 HOURS

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ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety

VOLUME 239

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Novelette—

Complete



"Butcher the spy!"
Hugh called

Crescent and Cross

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Author of "The Kingdom of Hell," "Toughest in the Legion," etc.

Defiantly the Turks defended the walls of Antioch against the Crusaders—and secretly and well, Denis the Briton laid his plans

CHAPTER I.

FIRE AT NIGHT.

THE giant machine was ghostly behind the screen of laurels, and the men who worked on the monster beams were stealthy, cat-silent, so many wraiths in the shadows. Moonlight filtering through foliage surprised a steely glint on hammer, adz and saw; caught the glisten of sweat-drenched bodies.

The dark was alive with a whispering, a muffled tapping of mallets, the

squeak of straining timber and wooden pins. Workmen heaved on a sapling mast to moor it in the base of the mammoth frame. A trio of artisans fought to make fast a rope that would spring the machine's throwing-arm. Carpenters and waggoners worked to install a wheel on the throwing-arm axle, laboring in clandestine silence. There must be no slip in the plans. The mangonel was almost done.

By dawn this monster gyn, so many painful weeks in the secret manufacture, would be ready for the rush.



Lithe as a panther, Denis met stroke with stroke

Even now the horses that would race it downhill were waiting in the laurel. There would be a signal. The mangonel would burst from its hiding place, wheel swiftly into battle. Trained men waited to snap the ingenious levers, aim the battery. Soldiers would plant heavy rocks on the throwing arm. The mast would leap in the frame, spring with a crash, send rock after rock to smash enemy walls.

A sense of high excitement pervaded the glade. The building engineers were tense as artists, putting the final touches to the masterpiece. Beyond the laurel the pikemen mounting guard watched the slope below with an added caution. Guard meeting guard would give hushed salutation, low-voiced salute. "Is that you, Robert Big-nose? All's well?"—"Aye. Tell me, Fleming. The gyn? It is almost finished?"—"By dawn, they say. The Turks, Heaven curse them, will get a

fine surprise. Our captain tells us to keep extra watch to-night. Nothing must go wrong this time."—"The secret has been well kept, Fleming. Even the troops do not know what has gone on up here. I—Look sharp there, Fleming! Was something moving down there among those thrice-cursed olive trees?"

But the guards were nervous, and they saw it was only the wind making shadows to shift. The valley below the laurel grove was quiet as sleep. Far down the woods-spotted slope the Orontes River was a silent silver belt unwinding through patches of moonlit marsh and meadow. At sunrise the mangonel in the laurels would dash down the slope to the river bank; hurl its missiles thundering at the wall across the stream, Antioch.

Antioch. There lay the Turkish stronghold, a gray stone beast sprawled slumbering in the confidence of power,

impregnable for hundreds of years on the southern bank of the river. Massive, thirty-foot walls behind deep moats. Square watch-towers rearing up sixty feet at intervals in the battlements manned by alert Moslem archers. And a frowning, forbidding shadow behind the wall-encompassed city, the citadel where Yagi Siyan and his Saracen generals laughed defiance at the gesture of a Christian army. Antioch—the key to Syria and the stumbling block to stop the Crusaders trying to gain the Holy Land. Antioch must be smashed, and the way to smash Antioch was to smash the gates in the wall.

The Bridge Gate lay in that reach of wall that frowned along the river, and the soldiers of the Cross had stormed it to their sorrow. All winter and spring they had reddened the river with their attempts; now they waited in their tents on the north side of the valley, holding siege. The armies of Bohemund and Adhemar, Tancred and Stephen, St. Giles and Robert and Godfrey of Bouillon. Frenchmen, Normans, and Flemings, Germans and Provençals; soldiers from far corners of Europe come to save the Holy Land for Christendom. Men of iron and steel led by the sterling of western knighthood. Antioch, stronghold of Islam, defiantly blocked the path.

But the pikemen guarding the laurel grove were whispering, and a mighty engine of war would soon be ready to strike a crushing blow from behind its veil of trees.

"Look now, Fleming, the gyn will smash that gate to dust!"—"Aye, Big-nose, the Moslem curs will find out to their sorrow. A marvelous engine it is. Never have I seen such a mangonel, and I have been with the engineers through forty campaigns. A great

engineer, this Raymond of Lombardy who designed it. Only Bohemund and the Lombard and those three others of the engineer corps know how to launch the machine. They have guarded well the secret."—"The Bridge Gate will be stormed and fall to pieces, eh? Those dogs of Turks—God's wounds! Fleming! *I swear something moves among those olive trees!*"

SOMETHING had moved among those olive trees. The quiet was broken by a soft *ping*, and a silvery shaft came streaking through the moonlight. The guard named Big-nose took four steps forward and three steps back and sat on the ground with an arrow in his throat. The Flemish guardsman opened his mouth to yell and a metal lightning bolt shot from shadow and smashed through his upper teeth to stifle the sound. Simultaneously a second dart whirled into his chest, an arrow spun into his buckling stomach and three shadows detached themselves from a near-by bush and raced for the laurels.

At once the slope was alive with men. Moonlight gleamed on swarthy, beady-eyed faces; caught the shimmer of sabres and scimitars and five-foot bows. A glitter of chain mail hauberks. A quick, live tattoo of hoofs. A knot of horsemen plunging from the dark beneath the olive trees to join the men on foot.

The mounted men wore coats of uniform mail, all save their leader. Low in saddle, his henna-dyed beard blowing like a flame on his face, a spotted mantle of fur streaming a weird splash of black-and-yellow color in the night, this leader was the very spirit of Mahound, savage and barbaric, as he led his men through the dark. Fleet, swift as a wind-breath,

horsemen and soldiers swept into the grove of laurels. The quiet fell to shards with a blasting howl. Shadows blew to pieces in a wild kaleidoscope of movement, color and noise. Arrows sang, blades struck and clashed, men screamed. "The Moslems!"—"Blood of heaven, we are betrayed!"—"Men of Normandy! Provençals! To arms! To arms!"

A shrill battle-cry wailed through the dark. "Yah! Yah! Yah Allah!" And then a chorus of mortal terror. "We are betrayed! It is the Leopard! *The Leopard!*" The shriek echoed down the slopes and through the trees and caromed off down the valley. Lights sparked in the dark encampments. Men shouted. Boots and hoofs came pounding. "The Leopard! To arms! Men of the Cross, to arms! The Leopard! Up there in the laurels—"

The laurels might have been struck by a whirlwind. Dust and noise roared up to the sky. Then something else went up to the sky. A flicker of scarlet whipped high in the dark, danced, grew, hung wavering in the night. Wind caught the blaze and flung it towering. Men fled shrieking with scorched cheeks; and a wild horseman with a wild, black-and-yellow cloak flapping from his shoulders and a blazing torch in his fist crashed yelling and away through the brush. Smoke and red light flooded the glade. A French guard with a lance in his hand sprang into the horseman's path. The torch went sailing, and a monstrous, shining scimitar swept high in the rider's freed hand. The lance missed. The scimitar flashed down. The French guard fell headless to the ground.

When the three knights thundered into the laurel grove, their horses lathering, swords slashing into the

brush, they found their soldiers butchered and the enemy gone. So was the mangonel. The mighty engine was a tottering skeleton of flame that collapsed in a fountain of fire, shot a blazing geyser at the stars and shed for an instant a furnace-hot glow all the way across the valley to paint with crimson light the distant walls of Antioch.

RAYMOND of Lombardy struck the table with a crashing mailed fist, and the copper flagons jumped. "And I say again that Denis of England is a coward!" The big Lombard's dark eyes were bitter. The voice from his ragged, iron beard filled the tent with a sullen thunder. "A coward I say, by God's wounds! Where has he been each time Arslan the Leopard attacks us? When this mightiest Turk of them all comes to raid us and shatter our schemes, where is Denis the Briton? Never has he been on the field when the Moslem Leopard's standard appeared!" With an angry gesture Raymond spat through his sword-scarred lips. "I say Denis of England is afraid of the Leopard. I say Denis of England is a coward!"

"Raymond, I say you are wrong!" The white-haired knight at table's end looked up from the clutter of jars and mortars and vials, tossed aside his alchemist's spoon, and addressed the giant Lombard sharply. This was Baldwin of Flanders, blue-eyed, wrinkled, bearded with snow, old in the craft of war and men, with a heart divided three ways between alchemy, fighting and religion.

"I say you are wrong to call Denis craven. What has come over you, Raymond? No truer knight than Denis rides in all our army. No finer soldier

has pledged his soul to the service of the Cross. At Doryleum, at Nicea, at Rodosto he was always first to charge the Turk, his longsword never failing. Have you forgotten how, only last month, Denis slew Madud the Seljuk? The Turk demon armed with a sabre and charging from ambush, and Denis surprised with only a knife? Denis stood his ground and cut down the Seljuk, and now you pronounce him a coward. Is it right to talk thus of one who has marched at our side these two desperate years, sharing our tent and food, our privation and battle and prayer, sword for sword with us and never a cavil at the hardship—our sworn comrade? Denis of England is never a coward!"

"With your nose in those smell-pots you do not see!" Raymond of Lombardy growled. "It is only of late—" But his words were interrupted by a rataplan of hoofs without. The tent door swished open, and a lean, tight-nerved figure, immaculately accoutered in polished chain mail, leapt for the table, snatched a wine tankard, drank gurgling mouthfuls, and blurted:

"Comrades! The devil to pay. Bohemund and our generals are wild! Counting on this mangonel of ours to smash the Bridge Gate this morning, they had planned elaborate assault. Godfrey's Rhinelanders were to charge the bridge, the army was to assault the wall westward, and John of Toul was dispatched early last night with a flying corps of axmen to surprise the east wall at first signal of conflict.

"John cannot now be located, the assaults are canceled, the council rages with fury. With the mangonel ruined the plans are hopeless. A thousand curses—" The speaker stopped short; glared at the two before him. "God's burden! You, Raymond. Baldwin.

You are—by my faith! I think you have been quarreling."

Baldwin shook his head. "Raymond is bitter.

"He has let last night's defeat curdle his soul. The morning finds him ugly with disappointment, and he vents his anger on our comrade, Denis, calling him coward."

"Look then," the Lombard demanded. "Is not Denis acting strangely these days? Pale, uneasy, silent with us. Never at our side to battle the Leopard devil. Always wandering off by himself, too, and seldom sharing our camp fire as he used to. Only since we have stood before Antioch with the Leopard to threaten our lines has Denis acted thus. I say he seeks excuse for safety when the Moslem fiend attacks. What think you, Longlegs? Am I right?"

HUGH, Count of Poitiers, lounged on a bed of blankets, and carefully crossed the legs that had won him his nickname. With an indolent gesture he removed the conical French helmet with its furbished helm, shook free his auburn curls, tossed aside his gauntlets. Smooth-shaved, wire-lean, with cynical pale eyes and ironic mouth was Hugh of Poitiers.

"What say you, Longlegs?" the hulking Raymond insisted doggedly. "Do you not think our Denis acts cowardly of late?"

"But so it might seem," the Frenchman admitted, a respectful eye on Baldwin. "I know you love him, my old one. So do Raymond and I. But on thought one realizes that Denis has never been on hand when the Leopard struck."

"Always behind the lines or off with dispatches," the Lombard denounced. "I only realized this when the demon

Leopard wrecked my mangonel last night and Denis was not with us to the charge. Dispatches, pah! More likely visiting the tents of Count Edmund's hospital, safe behind Lance Hill. It is the talk of every camp how Denis spurs over to the hospital encampment—"

Baldwin of Flanders growled. "Now I perceive! Raymond is jealous. Perhaps it is that Denis of England is winning the heart of Edmund's daughter, the lovely Josselin, who has such eyes of blue and hair of gold and bravely follows her father's mission into this devil's land. You slander Denis, Raymond, because the lady is favoring his hand—"

"Untrue!" the giant shouted, his massive face stained red. "You know I could take the lady, her or any other, for my own if so I wished. A warrior, I, too busy scheming to slay the foul Turk for time with love. I only say Denis is craven because—"

"In truth he *has* acted queerly these past days," Hugh put in. "Since we have laid siege on Antioch. The Leopard is not like the other champions we have thus far encountered. But a devil, who comes like a wind at night, vanishes like a morning mist, reads the innermost secrets of our army. And even in far Byzantium the fame of the Moslem scourge is whispered among soldiery.

May be, good Baldwin, that Denis *does* fear this Turkish boast—"

Standing to his feet, Baldwin of Flanders pushed aside his chemist's jars with a growl. "Were Denis to hear you, his sworn comrades, thus doubting him," the old knight protested grimly, "there would be trouble for us all."

"But I did hear them!"

The door of the tent whipped open;

and Denis of England stood white-lipped on the threshold.

CHAPTER II.

THE SARACEN STRIKES.

EARLY sunshine tipped with pale fire the point of the belted longsword, shone bronze on mailed shoulders and breastplate. Tall, chin high, strong shoulders squared, he stood there framed against the new day; bareheaded, his hay-colored, short-sheared hair a-toss across his white forehead. One could have found humor in the line of the mouth and puckered blue eyes, but it was not there now. Now the mouth was bloodless beneath a mask of grime, and the eyes, worn with fatigue, flashed savage topaz to match the glint of the sword at his side.

"I heard you." The bitter mouth broke a silence cut from stone. The eyes flung their sharp-honed gleam at the Frenchman on the blankets, at the white-maned Baldwin tense-posed at table's end; finally rested on the sullen countenance of Raymond the Lombard. "So, my Raymond. You think me a coward, do you?"

"Afraid," the Lombard snarled, his eye on the other's sword-hand. "I said you were afraid. Of Arslan the Leopard—"

"And you!" The metal eyes burned on Hugh of Poitiers. "Speak, Long-legs. By the bones of Holy St. Giles! You believe me craven, too?"

The Frenchman shifted uneasily. "Only—but I do not like to say this, Denis. We four have stood together like brothers with a common heart. Yet what has come over you these past weeks, Denis? Holding off by yourself as if keeping something from us. No

longer joining us at campfire or communion. Aye. It is true the mighty Bohemund calls you often to the service of the council. But—my faith! Denis, with every soldier of the Cross burning to smite the Moslem champion you are off on other affairs. And last night when he scourged our engineers' camp, and we strove to trap him, you were not even to the fray—"

"But most likely holding rendezvous in that monkish hospital camp safe quartered behind Lance Hill," Raymond dourly accused, "while your comrades did battle with the Moslem scourge. It would appear you no longer are an engineer. I would think the station of a knight was hard by the ground of conflict, and it is become common talk among the troops how Denis the Briton goes often to the hospital camp. Twice I, myself, have seen you of late, lounging in the shade of that dead oak which marks the highway-turn to Lance Hill. It is so. Lounging under that tree by the road-fork where that old Armenian peasant tills a field; and he far busier than you. More seemly, I would think, if you spent less effort in visiting the flawless Josselin—"

With a crackling oath the tall warrior leapt from the doorway; hand speeding to the hilt of his sword. There was no vestige of humor, now, in that blood-drained Saxon face, and the quickened fury of the eyes brought Hugh starting up from his blankets, Baldwin springing around from the table amidst a scatter of bottles, and Raymond snatching fast for his blade.

"By my holy rood!" Denis's voice was a snapping whip. "I go for duty to the council on errands which are no choice of mine. And first you name me coward! And then you bring the fair name of Count Edmund's daugh-

ter into your jealous slander—" And Baldwin fighting to catch Denis's arm was wailing: "Wait! Comrade! They did not mean—" Hugh's French profanity heightened the mounting furore. Raymond bawled: "Enough of the fool boy!" Denis, struggling to free himself of Baldwin's hands, cried thickly: "But mention the name of the lady once again, and warn you, Raymond and Hugh, it will cost you blood. Call me anything you wish, but the name of Josselin shall make no gossip for varlets and clapper-claws—"

"Comrades!" Baldwin cried, shrill with dismay. "We four have always been together. There must be no quarrel between us. Hold, Denis. Friend. We do trust you—"

"But only you," the Briton panted. "And if these other two were not sworn my friends I would lay my steel on their faithless hides, and—"

A BRASSY scream rang through the tent to stifle the chorus of angry words. A quivering, tenor trumpet-blast that pealed through the tent door, stayed Denis's upraised fist, stopped the waving, knotted hands of Hugh and Baldwin and the Lombard. At the second blast each knight made a rush for the open; bounded out to a day that had waked to the signals of alarm.

Down the slope where the tents of Godfrey's Rhinelanders squatted in shabby alignment men were shouting for the mounts, squires and archers were running. A squad of mailed knights had started down the valley, trailing dust plumes through the olive groves. Among the trees a supply train had stopped, the waggoners craning their necks and pointing in the direction of the river. Beyond the track where the carts had halted stood the

peaked pavilion of Bohemund the Mighty, the council tent of the Christian generals. Orderlies were racing from the pavilion door; and a standard bearer hoisting the blue gonfalon of Godfrey's cavalry bounded past the council guard, screaming the Rhineland battle-cry.

"Look!" Raymond of Lombardy flung up a fist. "See there! A dust cloud below the Antioch wall. Not the bridge. Farther to east. By those cursed marshes where the river bends—"

"Horsemen!" Denis of England glared under a shading hand. "The Turks, by my faith! They sally from that postern hard by the tower. Those green Moslem banners. Under their wall!"

"God's wounds!" Baldwin gasped. "I see the red pennant of John of Toul. It is John of Toul in that marsh, and the Moslems have ambushed him! See! See! He is surrounded by the charging sons of Mahound—"

A morning of azure, fresh green and gold, the crystalline air of the uplands afforded clear vision for miles. Down the valley the river was a winding, heliotrope ribbon under the scowling Antioch battlements. Running close under the crenellated stone escarpments where a beetling tower marked the stronghold's eastern corner, the river spilled blue through a shallow green marshland.

Where marsh birds should have wheeled in the dawn-shine, sabres flashed and banners flagged among the reeds. Sunbeams twinkled on helmets and hauberks and chain-coats. A faint jingle of metal striking metal echoed across the valley. Tiny cries trebled shrill above the clangor of arms; and the soldiers in the camp of the Cross could see outstanding in the miniature

mêlée a lonely red banner ringed by banners of green. Soldiers were like swarming bright ants pouring from the postern near the tower. The red banner had become engulfed.

"It is John of Toul—his corps of axmen!" Baldwin of Flanders shouted hoarse oaths. "Watch! The Turks! They have cut off his retreat—"

"John of Toul. A handful against a thousand!" Denis was ghostly pale; pointing a shaking hand. "They will smash John to dust. We—"

"Quick!" It was Hugh of Poitiers. "Must we stand here like clodfooted serfs entranced by gleemen? To horse, I say. It is only five leagues by the back road. We can beat Godfrey's cavalry, by heaven! The clumsy dogs are taking the longest route. But fast. To the rescue of John!"

"Never can we get there in time!" Denis shouted. "The marsh—"

BUT Hugh was screaming for mounts. Squires came scampering. Meantime every tent on the slope was spilling squads of soldiery, the guard trumpets continued to shrill, and the whole valley echoed with sound as half the Christian army started on foot to gain the river. For a moment Denis hesitated; then sprang to join the others. Sure-footed and lithe as an animal he swung into saddle with the ease of one born to ride wild steeds down wind-swept moors; and only a warrior who had spent half his life on horseback could have ridden so, with a barbaric, effortless grace that made of rider and mount a fleet and rhythmic wind.

The engineers' camp disappeared in a gust of dust. Hugh took the lead; skirted the laurels where a hill of black ashes smoked, and smashed into underbrush unmarked by a road. "We gain

the road farther east," the Frenchman shouted, "and avoid the marsh by a league. God give us time—"

Longswords drawn and blazing like streaks of silver fire, the four raced neck and neck. Through rank bracken and across a swampy field. Past a crumbled ruin and through a grove of old pines. Topping a stony ridge they lost sight of the camp of the Cross, and clattered down a narrow, barren cañon. A mile to southward a dust cloud smoked in the wake of Godfrey's cavalry riding an easier road by the river. But the Rhinelanders would soon encounter a swampy morass and be slowed in green mire.

The walls of Antioch appeared—a nearing black shadow; and the clamor of conflict beneath that shadow loudened. Spurring furiously, the four knights crashed through a tangle of briar at cañon's end and plunged out on a brown pike that curved down the valley to the marsh. With a Saxon battle-yell, Denis swept into the lead; pounded down the roadway in a brown haze. Now he could clearly distinguish the bowmen on the high stone cliffs reared across the marsh, the lancers pouring from the opened postern, the fighting men in a shining, screaming tangle beneath the corner tower. He could plainly see the tattered red pennon marooned in a whirl of green flags, like a scarlet hub in the center of a shrieking, spinning, emerald wheel. Standing stiff in his stirrups, the Briton pointed out the red banner with his sword; screamed back at the men behind him. "Too late! By God's wounds, we cannot save him—"

"Press on!" the others screamed. But there was a half mile yet to go, and a marsh to ford. Denis groaned to himself and put spurs to his striv-

ing horse, his eye on that foundered dot of crimson beneath the gray sweep of stone wall. Wind dashed cold sweat-beads from his face. Too late. No chance with that marsh. But to stay behind at this race would be a fatal admission. "Press on!" Hugh's screams pierced the din of flying hoofs. "Press on—"

DENIS of England held lead, riding low in saddle, taut-nerved, yellow hair streaming, teeth clenched. The road turned sharply; gained a bend where the highway forked two ways at the foot of a giant oak that jabbed dead black arms at the sky. The valley, here, swept down to the river, a long, grassy hillside. And by the side of the road near the lone dead oak stood a withered plowman, his bony horse and share deserted in the field. Eyes shaded by a twig-like hand, he was like something in dead wood, too, watching the conflict at valley-bottom.

Seeing the knights riding down on him he turned with a cheer. "Warriors of the Cross! But fast! The Leopard is down there! The Moslem!" The squeaky wail pierced shrill above the racket of hoofs, and Denis of England heard. A strange cry flew from the Briton's teeth, and he made a quick twist in the saddle. At the move his horse swerved suddenly, reared kicking in a frantic curvet that almost hurled the Briton clear. Coming fast on his heels, it was all Baldwin could do to keep from crashing into the Briton. Raymond's mount stopped short on its haunches; and Hugh of Poitiers gave a wild, sideways leap, avoiding collision by a hair's breadth.

It was only a second's delay; and once more the four were charging down the hill road, eyes burning on the tower that stood black against the

sun and the high, sharp-cornered wall from which bowmen sent a rain of arrows at the marsh. Under that pelting rain the marsh was roaring, and, backed against the wall, the red pennant that was John of Toul's bannered desperately in a broil of pikes and green spears. Just as Denis reached the rim of the reeds he saw the red pennon go down. Hugh was bawling for more speed, but the horses were floundering in the dark mud; and Raymond of Lombardy shrieked: "John is gone now! See! The Leopard! John and the Leopard—"

John of Toul and the Leopard of Islam! Face to face they stood the narrow mud-bank under the tower. John of Toul—a bleeding, knife-torn figure; back pressed against the shadowy wall, red pennon caught under one arm, red face dodging on stooped shoulders, a red arrow jutting from the chain-mesh on his chest, his right arm struggling to slash and whip the longsword that seemed so heavy to his hand. And dancing in and out with fiendish agility around the trapped Christian, the massive warrior with the glittering hauberk and lush henna beard, the leopard-skin mantle that floated on his shoulder like grisly butterfly wings, the mighty scimitar that flickered, stabbed, cut and jabbed till it was steel no more, but a livid streak of red light. The Moslem lancers were standing at distance, a cheering audience; and the knights across the marsh could see. They saw the scimitar flash and the longsword parry; the scimitar whip upward, and the blundering blade of the Christian go flying through the air. Like a bolt of lightning the scimitar smote down; cut the brave red banner from its staff and the brave red face from its head with one fell slash.

A trumpeting cheer dinned up from the Antioch wall. The Leopard hurled the red, dripping sickle high above his head and caught it with a triumphant scream. Godfrey's cavalry charged up from the west to join the four, stunned in saddle, on the northern marsh-bank; and the Moslem lancers fled, jeering, through their waiting postern. John of Toul and his axmen were left behind; but Arslan the Leopard waited, too. An instant he stood there with the dead about him; held high in one fist the scarlet scimitar, in the other a little leathern bag. A moment he posed in silence; then a crass guffaw burst from his henna beard and rattled across the marsh like the sound of brass chains against iron. Arslan the Leopard guffawed. Arslan the Leopard laughed and flung out a hand and sent a little leather bag whirling over the reeds to drop among the warriors of the Cross.

Then he bounded for the postern; the gate crashed behind the spotted robe; and the bowmen in the tower dropped a rain of arrows to warn the Christians away.

CHAPTER III.

THE CHALLENGE.

RAYMOND the Lombard snatched wine. Hugh polished his sword.

Denis kicked his wet saddle into a corner and slumped down, hands to his face. It was old Baldwin, seated at his inevitable table with his colored jars, who finally broke the bitter quiet. "Now by the crown, here was a foul morning's game to have to see." The old Fleming's hands quivered among the jugs. "Would God I could find some alchemy here, some devil's concoction to poison that Antioch away.

Poor John. Trapped. Ambushed. Cut down."

"Aye," Hugh's voice was savage. "Hacked to pieces like a trussed pig in a slaughter pen. And with never a chance to be saved. An axman, John was, with never a blade to match that fiend's!"

"So!" from Raymond, voice hoarse in his tankard. "If only that marsh had not hindered us. And John was my friend. To see him butchered, there, with his men. Butchered by the champion of Islam—"

"Like a cat plays with a mouse." Denis lifted a white face from his hands, and his voice was a tortured whisper. His nervous fingers fumbled through his yellow hair. "War! That is all right. But this Leopard is a torturer. I knew John could not be rescued. The Leopard must have caught him long before dawn, but forced him to the river bank and slew him slowly so that we of the Cross could see."

"Most horrible," the French knight snarled. "That thrice-cursed brother of Mahound! He smashes our mangonel in the night, finding it out by demon's divining; then tracks John's axmen sent by Bohemund to flank the wall from the east. Hearing no signal for battle, John must have guessed the plans were fouled, and tried to regain our camp. But the Leopard has surrounded him. Holy Mother! I would sell my soul to know how this fiend of Islam uncovers our every plan, strikes to the very center of our camp to wreck our gyny, knows that John has crossed the river when John led his men many leagues upstream and crossed under cover of night. Does Satan reveal our council's schemes? I would sell—"

"And I," blurted Raymond, "would sell my soul to meet this Leopard in

honest battle, sword for sword. You heard him taunt us with a laugh? And by God's wounds," the Lombard looked up from his tankard with a fierce oath, "you remember? What of that thing he threw at us? You recall? Some object sailed from his hand—"

"The Rhinelanders picked it up," Denis nodded, his eyes narrowing. "Some heathen charm, no doubt, with which the Godless champion hoped to work us an ill."

"But look!" Baldwin demanded suddenly, holding up a jar. "I have just discovered something to work them ill. Denis! Ho, lad, see this!" The Fleming's eyes were like furbished stones as he sprang to his feet. "By heaven, I just now fathomed the secret. You know how I have sought the secret of that strange fire the soldiers of Byzantium were throwing at us through iron tubes when we stormed their outpost last year? How we labored to discover the ingredients of that blaze which came not from wood? But just now I brushed by accident a sulphur into this jar of naphtha and resin and—"

"You have it!" Denis was on his feet, face twisting with excitement. Now the blue eyes were puckered bright, and he flung a shaking hand to Baldwin's shoulder. "You have found it, then! How we hunted the secret! Greek fire! Hugh! Raymond! Naphtha, resin, sulphur—why, it is just the mixture I recall overhearing that Byzantine monk— Eut, by the rood! now I can—now I can—"

"What?" Baldwin shouted. But the words had gone on Denis's tongue, and he stood in sudden silence, shaking his head. "I was thinking," he whispered, "that some day Raymond might build us a fire gyn of some manner. I—look you, Raymond—"

"It is nonsense." Sullenly the Lombard shook his heavy beard. "Playing with witchcraft will bring us harm. Perhaps such alchemies have already won us God's disfavor, and He has punished us by giving the Leopard of Islam a power to divine our secret plans." Eyes uneasy on the jar in Baldwin's hand, the Lombard protested. "Such magic is not for true soldiers. Have not our gyps already come to naught? Enough of engines and witchcraft mixtures. I say the sword alone can conquer this Arslan and his Antioch. This monster who works us evil by throwing at us charms wrapped in leather bags."

THERE came a sudden interruption. "But a message it was!"

The voice that spoke from the tent door was followed by the face of a Flemish pikeman, cheeks swollen with quickened breath, peeking through the flap. "A message from the Turks, my masters. The barons of the seigneur, Godfrey, carried it to our camp, saying it was for one of you. It is written, my lords, in French—"

"Then mine it is!" Hugh of Poitiers snatched at the leathern pouch. Baldwin swore and threw a cape over his mysterious jars. Raymond pushed the messenger from the tent. Denis shot a quick glance at his comrades, then bent to watch Hugh pour a little handful of colored stones from the sack, and draw to light a crumpled sheaf of parchment.

"Read it!" Raymond was dancing with excitement. "Be quick!"

"In the name of the Cross!" Baldwin shouted. "Tell us!"

Denis was pale and his voice was strangely pitched. "Come, Longlegs. What does the cursed thing say?"

"Would to heaven it were mine,"

Hugh panted, "but to me never falls such good fortune. By my blood, comrades, this challenge comes from Arslan the Leopard!"

"Challenge! Arslan the Leopard!"

The others yelled with one voice.

"Read it, in heaven's own name!"

"Listen, then." Low-voiced, the French knight began to read. "With the aid of Allah and in the reign of our sovereign Yagi Siyyan, asylum of the world, greatest and most powerful of monarchs. I, Arslan the Leopard, emulator of Mohammed and sword of death to Unbelievers, extend this challenge. Will the Infidel who slew my most honorable cousin and defender of the True Faith, Madud the Seljuk, in battle a quarter moon past, dare give me the honor of a meeting in fair contest, his sword alone against mine? My standard will be raised on the Infidel's own ground, the north bank of the river in open field by that road which leads to the marsh, to-morrow at rise of sun. Let that Infidel come if he dare; he who slew Madud the Seljuk."

"A challenge to single combat!"

Eyes twinkling with delight, Baldwin caught at the Briton's arm; clapped at his shoulder with a cry. "By Holy St. Leo, Denis, this challenge is yours. You who slew Madud the Seljuk! Yours, and what fortune! By God's rood, you can meet the champion of Islam! To Denis!" he cheered, lifting a flagon to the roof. "Our comrade and sworn friend. He will bring honor to our tent. He—" But the Fleming's exultant voice faded in his white beard; for a strange expression had come to wrench the face of Denis of England into a tortured mask. Standing there, the tall warrior seemed to shrink. Pallor crept slowly to his temples, washing his cheeks with wet snow. His eyes, on the parchment in

Hugh's hand were suddenly dark as deep wells, and his colorless lips seemed struggling for speech that did not want to come.

With a cry the old Fleming shook at the Briton's sleeve. "God's wounds now, boy, what is ill? You will honor this challenge from Islam and drive your sword to the heart of this devil? You will go to the field? You will meet Arslan the Leopard at rise of to-morrow's sun—"

Cords stood down the Briton's waxy jaw. Slowly he lifted a weighted hand to remove the Fleming's fingers from his arm. Slowly he shook his head. Fighting hard to speak, the bloodless lips could only murmur: "No, Baldwin. No, comrades. I—I am given leave by Bohemund, and go to Lance Hill to-night. I—I will not return in time. I cannot meet Arslan the Leopard at to-morrow dawn."

Baldwin's voice was low, but it smashed the quiet to shards. "Then Raymond was right; and Hugh was right. And I, my fine Briton, was wrong. You are craven, Denis, and afraid. You, Denis of England, are a coward!"

Lashing out like a whip, the words left on the Briton's cheek a crimson, smoldering flush. Turning on heel, Denis of England strode swiftly from the tent.

SWINGING from the saddle with an ease of motion that scarcely jingled the links of his chain-coat, Denis hurried to the pavilion of Bohemund the Mighty. "Let by!" he demanded bluntly of the guardsman. "It is Denis of England who wishes to see the great seigneur."

"Your pardon, my master." The sentry lowered his pike. "But Lord Bohemund is not here—"

"Not here!" Denis barked, making a fist of his gantlet. "By God's rood, fellow, you say Bohemund has left camp?"

"But shortly after noon," the guard nodded. "With orders to say he would not return until midnight. He has ridden to the camp of Lord Stephen, sire, taking his bodyguard with him—"

"Not return until midnight!" With a harassed gesture, Denis turned back to his champing mount. "Blood!" he whispered through his teeth, swinging to horse. "And to the camp of Stephen. A long ride. Too long. And Bohemund alone holds the key to this cursed affair of mine—"

A weight seemed to sag the Briton's shoulders, and with heavy hand on bridle he spurred away. The sentry had not heard his words, but had marked the expression on his face. "A look of strange sadness," he told the captain of the guard who approached him later. "That knight of the engineers' tent. The young Briton who rides like such a warrior. By my faith, he looked like one struck from behind when I told him Lord Bohemund's order—"

"Aye," the captain returned, "that one is called Denis. You have not heard the story, then? It is said he was challenged by the Leopard of Islam, and—"

Fortunate for the guardsmen that Denis of England had not returned to hear their words. Riding through woods filled with dusk, the Briton's face was like something savage in iron, and he coughed to loosen the steel bands that made vises about his throat. Bitter thoughts reddened the temples beneath the blowing yellow hair, and a hot flush ebbed and waned in his cheeks. At one point in the trail he

turned with a sudden oath, yanked free his blade and started back for the camp. Then the flush was gone, and his face, pale white, wore a bleak smile.

"Heaven's crown and St. Giles," he whispered to his mount, "this temper of mine will be my ruin one day. But I am trapped, comrade, trapped. And Bohemund departed, to trap me the more. God give me time and courage enough to do what I have yet to do—"

CHAPTER IV.

THE ASSIGNATION.

TWILIGHT made a cool liquor that flowed down the valley, gentling hard outlines with mauve and shedding long shadows down the slope to dim the somber battlements of Antioch across the sunset-lacquered river. High in the watch-towers the Moslem guards were lighting their resin flares, and deep in the walled city's heart pious muezzins were chanting the evening call to prayer.

"*Haya Allah Salat— Haya Allah Falaah—*"

The somnolent singsong drone echoed softly across the dusk, and the plowman on the hill stopped his horse to stand listening; then trudged on behind the crude share, leaving a long black furrow in his wake. He steered an oblique, tired path across the slope, marking his course by the dead oak tree that reared in dismal silhouette against a sky of rose and that marked the fork of the road that divided for a northward turn to Lance Hill and a southward curve toward the river.

Twilight shafting through the leafless branches of the tree found a shimmer of steel beneath; and the plodding plowman was surprised to see a

warrior standing there in shadow, hands folded on the hilt of his longsword, yellow head bowed with chin on breast like one deep in prayer. Halting his share by the road the peasant called greeting; and the soldier looked up with a start.

"You toil late, my old one. Sunrise to dark I see you tilling that field of yours."

"Aye, master," the peasant whined. "A fruitless ground, torn by many wars. Were it not for your barons of the Cross encamped at valley's end I should have starved. We of the valley have suffered much at the hands of the Turk." The old man shook a knotty fist at the tower across the river and cackled with querulous vehemence. "A curse on them, sire, and may you of the Cross smite them soon."

"Tell me." The knight's blue eyes searched the old man's withered face. "Are you not the Armenian who brings produce to Bohemund's camp at the end of the valley?"

"And sell it as cheap as I may," the old one nodded, "earning only enough to keep my humble body alive. God help your armies to take Antioch, sire, for if the Turks drive you away they will slay every Christian farmer in Syria."

Mumbling and dejected, the old man started his horse. They were ghosts in the blue dusk, blundering over the hilltop in their mutual struggle with the plow. Denis of England sighed back against the tree, watched them go. From the crudely-furrowed field the Briton's eye wandered to the frowning stone walls of Antioch a half mile distant across the valley. But the dusk was fragrant with the smell of fresh-turned earth, a smell of springtime. He glared at the plowed hillside, black-striped by the clumsy Armenian share.

The wind brought a scent of wet grass. There were fields in England like that.

Angrily the Briton shook his shoulders; gripped his sword-hilt. No time for sentiment. "I am a soft-hearted serf!" he cursed himself under his breath. "By the rood, I will be glad when this infernal business is done. A fool to let that clapperclaw farmer see me standing here. If only the dark would come. And then I will show Raymond and Baldwin and Hugh, those poor deluded fools—"

Memory brought a flush to his face, and his cheeks stung hot as he thought of the engineers' tent in the camp beyond the hill. His fingers tensed on his sword. A dangerous incident, that quarrel in the tent. At a time when the smallest slip would prove fatal he had almost overplayed his hand. He must keep the grip of an iron vise on himself, and—

WHAT was that sound? "Hoofbeats!" His own voice startled his ear, and Denis of England drew back in the shadow of the tree, stiff-muscled, his eye on a cloud of dust that had puffed up on the ridge where the road to Lance Hill wound. The dust cloud traveled down the brown pike, coming towards him. Sharp-eyed, Denis made out a group of fast-riding horsemen, lancers clad in buff jerkins, and in their midst a rider in a blowing, white cloak. A startled exclamation escaped the English knight. Belting his longsword, he stepped out from under the tree to take a stand in the middle of the highway.

In a swirl of dust the horsemen drew rein; there was a sharp cry; the mounted men pulled to the side of the road to let the rider in the white cloak advance. As she spurred to the fore the twilight found a gleam of gold in her

tumbled hair; caught the glitter of the jewel at her throat. Denis flashed his longsword in salute; then darted to catch the reins of her mount with a cry. "Josselin!"

"And you." In the twilight her cheeks were like marble as she sat her saddle like a carving, tossed the gold hair back from her forehead with a delicate hand and looked down into his face. "Denis. We must talk—"

He nodded, and led the roan horse into the shadows of the ancient oak. "But, Josselin! What are you doing here? So far from your father's camp. In Heaven's name, Josselin! Why do you ride with this handful of men? A dangerous territory, this. Night coming on, and the very walls of the Moslems stronghold not half a mile distant—"

"Denis." Her voice was low, brook-clear. "I came to see you."

"To see *me*!"

"That is so." Nervously she caught her cloak about her; let slim fingers play with the gem that sparkled at the white arch of her throat. "I—told my father I was off at the bidding of mighty Bohemund; riding to his camp on an errand of mercy. But an hour ago I left Lance Hill with my squires. I will stay to-night with the nuns of Adhemar in Bohemund's camp. I had to see you." The emerald in her fingers was a dancing green light. "Oh, Denis—"

"You are beautiful—beautiful!" Catching at her cloak, he touched his lips to the mantle's hem in courtly gesture. "But, my Josselin, you must not do these dangerous things. The Moslems strike like a wind. Only this morning—"

"I know." She pointed. "In those marshes at the end of that road. It was there they ambushed John of Toul,

It was there his axmen were slain! It was there the Turkish warrior called Arslan the Leopard—”

Denis of England stepped back as if struck in the face. “Josselin! You have heard—”

“Yes,” she whispered. “The story reached father’s camp. The soldiers are talking. I heard! I heard how the Leopard flung his challenge across the river. To you, the challenge, Denis. To you. But the soldiers are talking, Denis.” And her voice was very low with the words: “They say—they say you refused the challenge, Denis. They say you dared not fight. They call you coward, because they think you dare not fight the Moslem. I—but I do not believe. I had to see you, Denis. It is not true, Denis. A lie, it is. A lie spread by those who envy the might of your unvanquished sword, Tell me, Denis. Tell me the story is a lie. You *are* going to meet the Turk to-morrow at dawn—”

“No!” he whispered.

“Denis!”

“No!”

“Denis, you must! For my sake! you *must*!”

His hands gripped her saddle, steel-fingered. For a moment the slow crimson fire burned like fever on his cheek, fading, left his face wool-gray in the gloom. “You must believe me. For me this has been a terrible day, my Josselin. First to see John slain! Then branded by the others, and no fair chance to claim my honor true. You—you must believe!” The words came brittle through his teeth. “I cannot meet the Leopard at dawn!”

But the hand came away from her throat fierce and swift; and the gem cast from her fingers fell to glitter, a tiny green spark, among the dead roots at his feet. “It is yours to keep, Denis

of England. No daughter—of Count Edmund could—could tolerate the gifts of a coward. Until I have learned otherwise of you—then—then—”

The roan horse curveted. The white cloak left a wind in the shadows. The girl and the buff-jerkined bodyguard clattered on up the road. Alone beneath the tree, Denis of England stood in a well of cold dark and listened to hoofbeats echo away in the direction of the camp of the Cross. When the sound had gone, he could lift a slow hand to brush gems of water from his forehead. Pale stars seemed to be winking in the high branches of the oak, and a lone green star mocked the twinkle where it lay on the ground.

FOR a long time the figure by the tree did not seem able to move.

Then suddenly it laughed. The crow-harsh laugh died, throaty, and a whisper, vehement with quick fury, came from the thin-drawn lips. “So then! I am to lose all! All!” Denis shook a knotted gantlet at the dark before his face, and his eyes were like little points of iron. “To the devil then, with Lord Bohemund! Denis of England is craven, so? But they shall soon see! They shall see—” A moment he stared at the green gem winking in the roots. Once more his lips grated out a laugh. Abruptly he clapped hand to sword-hilt, and ran.

On the descending roadway the dark lay thick; closed over him like a turbid veil. No sound save the pad of his feet in dust, the muted jangle of his oiled chain-coat. But twice he stopped, certain he had heard feet on the road other than his own. A third time he crouched in roadside brush, hunched down with longsword drawn, hot-eyed, nerves tight as cord.

“Nothing but wind in the leaves!

God's mercy, I am acting like a boy." Sheathing the blade he ran on, sure-footed on a path that he could not see; cantered silently off the road and into underbrush with the stealth of one used to woods at night. His fury had gone, now; tempered into a stern, Saxon determination. Weighted with mail, Denis could slip through the dark like a fox. Over the marshes the night hung thick as wizard's ink; but the torch-flares in the Antioch tower made a beacon.

Smell of reeds and dank water freighted the sceneless dark; and at last his boots squashed in mud, and he was following the bank of the river. Across the stream the stronghold wall was a ghostly, looming cliff flushed with pink haze where the sentries high on the parapet held their flares. The pink glow traveled down the wall to the muffled tramp of feet, flowed dim through the murk to pick out patches of marsh in the river below and touch the seeping current with a wavering, roseous shine.

Tensed, panther-like, the Briton moved through the reeds, feet sinking, soundless, in mire. On the wall scarce a stone's throw distant a guard appeared. Crouching motionless as rock, Denis watched the face of the Moslem sentinel, a disembodied mask painted crimson by the torch-blaze, move off high in the dark.

When the light and face had dimmed away in the swirling black, Denis silently shook off chain-coat and gantlets, stripped breast-plate and leather vest and mailed sleeves. Black air was cool on his naked back, and a faint beam gleamed on the rope-like muscles of his bared arms. Quickly unhooking baldric and sword, he hid them with his armor in the rushes.

Naked to the waist, he crouched on

the mud bank, breath-baited, every sense alert. The Saracen guard had appeared and faded out three times on the ghostly wall before Denis heard the sound for which he listened—the whisper of a body moving through the rushes.

A soft, clicking note like the chuckle of a sleepy bird. A sibilant answer. Then, in the reeds in front of the Briton, a bearded face appeared; white teeth and beady eyes in a dark countenance.

A quiet word breathed from Denis's lips. The head in the reeds nodded; a spectral hand beckoned. Mere shadow in the gloom, the Briton glided across the mud to grasp the waving hand. The gesture was followed by low-voiced consultation. Words muted by the splash of the seeping stream and the nocturnal rustling of the marsh. Then the naked shoulders of the Briton and the bearded face of his guide melted in the darkness.

A patch of reeds trembled gently; became still. A moment later any one near enough to suspect would have heard come from beyond the rushes an aqueous lisp, a muffled plash of water disturbed by the movements of unseen swimmers who strove for quiet.

And the one near enough to suspect *did* hear.

Silent, swift, he crept out through the reeds. A wraith in the darkness, he fumbled fierce hands among the rushes till his seeking fingers found the breast-plate and chain-coat, the abandoned baldric and sword.

Then the wraith turned to vanish in the darkness whence it had come, rushing off through the smothered undergrowth with the caution of one at night on an unfamiliar path. When the path reached open roadway the figure breathed a deep, savage oath, and ran.

The figure fled up the dark-hung road, past the fork where the dead tree stood black against the stars, past the field where the peasant had plowed, on up the narrow cañon where the briars were massed claws in the gloom. He was running like an antelope when he passed the laurels where a stench of burnt timber still lingered; and only slowed pace when he came within the light of bonfires burning in Bohemund's encampment.

Startled guards on the night watch lowered their pikes to let him pass, and the bonfires made of him a frantic, white-bearded gnome as he rushed down the line of ragged tents.

But a figure in a blowing white mantle stepped suddenly in his path; caught at his cape with a gasp.

"Lady Josselin! What—"

"Baldwin! You are pale! I heard you running! You—you bring bad news! What has happened?" She cried out, eyes glowing with alarm. "Baldwin! Did you find Denis? You bring word of Denis? He has—he has been in a fight? Tell me! He *has*! He has been in conflict! He has not proved a coward—"

Catching the pale hands tight in his, Baldwin of Flanders moved her gently to one side. "Stand back, Josselin. Yes—foul news!" The old Fleming panted, and snarled. "He is worse than a coward, Josselin! *A traitor!*"

CHAPTER V.

THREE AGAINST ONE.

A RANCID odor of strange things burning filled the tent. Green flame in the porcelain jar in his fist shed an eld light on Baldwin's face, matched the phosphorescent glow of the eyes beneath the snowy brows. A

pinch of this, a pinch of that, and the little fire puffed hot, flooding the tent with a wavering luminescence. The white-bearded face of the old Fleming, bent over bottles and jugs, assumed a savage twist. At last he shoved the smoking vessels aside, and, gripping the table with veiny hands, tugged himself to his feet.

"Comrades, I am ready."

"By my bones, it is just about time." Seated with his tankard near the door, Raymond of Lombardy glowered. "Why did you call us here, my old one? I was busy instructing my squires with the oiling of my mail—those fools!—when your summons came. And the armorers were honing for me my longsword. I have no time to watch these alchemies of yours, and, my faith, I do not hold with such doings that verge on witchery."

Unclasping the hands from behind his head, Hugh of Poitiers lounged up from his blankets. "An evil stench with which you poison the tent, Baldwin. But certainly you did not call Raymond here and keep me awake with your alchemies for the sole purpose of showing us a fire that burns without wood. Then what is that reason of this midnight conference?"

"You asked me to bring my longsword handy," the Lombard growled.

"And me to wear mine," the pale-eyed Frenchman reminded. "And then you make us watch a black magic, and offer no word to explain. This pot of fire—this stench—out with it, Baldwin. What means this mystery?"

"A fouler stench than you two have ever known!" The old knight's teeth grinned savagely through the wisping, green smoke. "For I speak of Denis of England!"

"And I have no time to hear of him," Raymond countered, rising.

"Nor I," snarled Hugh. "No time for the Briton since—"

"Wait!" Baldwin of Flanders shook a fist at the roof. "By God's wounds, you will have time to hear this. Listen! Comrades! You know how this morning the Briton refused to accept the Leopard's challenge to combat? We thought him craven, and by my blood! I felt sorry for the boy. When he did not return for evening meal and nowhere had been seen about the camp my heart was turned. He had been a good soldier; had helped me with my alchemies, and I did not want him scourged by the army's scorn."

"I set out to find him, comrades, thinking I might change his intention and inspire him to meet the Moslem after all. He had said he was riding to Lance Hill, and I with pitying heart, set out for the hospital encampment." Baldwin grabbed at a flagon, gulped wine, and went on.

"I found him at the fork of the road. You know where the dead oak divides the highway? Coming in sight of the road, I saw Denis, running like a fox. I followed him," Baldwin snarled, "down to the marsh by the river."

"And there, by God's wounds, he took a path through the marsh, coming to a place where he divested himself of sword and mail, and, hiding in the dark, encountered one who had come to meet him there. I heard them talking together, comrades; then they vanished and went swimming away. I say, by Heaven's crown, their words burned in my ears, and I heard them speak the tongue of the Moslems."

The Fleming struck the table with a fist, and his voice came harsh as grating iron. "I have learned enough of the language to comprehend! Denis spoke to tell the secret of the fire I

have only just discovered. He spoke of a secret tunnel, and asked about certain secret plans. His companion swore an oath by the name of Allah, and the Briton made known he would return to that spot in the marsh at an hour before daybreak. We will be there to meet him, my comrades! We will be there to greet this cursed Denis of England, who speaks the tongue of Mahound and whispers of plans and betrays my new-found secret fire and swims across the river in the night to join the Turks of Antioch." Baldwin's eyes blazed, and his fist was a shaking bludgeon, smashing at the table. "We will be there to catch Denis the Briton. The betrayer! The traitor! The spy!"

HOT oaths burst from the Lombard at the tent door. Hugh of Poitiers beat a fist on his chest, his eyes gone wintry behind a tumble of curls. "The dog! The fiend! He has betrayed us all! Befouled our tent! Muddled the very name of the Cross! So that is how Arslan the Leopard came to know every plan, every move of our army. No wonder Denis refused the Turk fiend's challenge. The message was a command in secret code! You see, comrades? You understand? And if Denis killed Madud the Seljuk it was by order of the Turks, themselves, who wished the Seljuk destroyed for reasons of their own. And the challenge was a code-message to Denis—"

"Our friend!" the Lombard panted. "Our sworn comrade. And every minute a spy who sold our secrets. We three he has betrayed, and the daughter of Count Edmund, too, visiting her father's camp as excuse to gain the highway down to Antioch—"

"He must die!" Hugh sobbed. "We must catch the Briton—"

"My own plan!" Baldwin of Flanders leaned across the table, hoarse-voiced. "We will catch the Briton when he returns for his mail and sword at his accursed rendezvous in the marsh. To us, to his comrades betrayed by his lying tongue and praying blasphemies, he owes the debt. We shall collect that debt, we three. He would not fight Arslan the Leopard, but he shall fight us. First, Raymond! He shall fight you, Raymond. You shall take with you two battle-axes; one for you, one for *him*! You, the finest axman in God's army. We shall carry the Briton to the field by the dead oak tree, and you shall play with him as the Leopard played with John of Toul! You shall cut the ax out of his hand, and slash the ribs on his chest—"

The giant Lombard gnawed in his beard, cursing softly. "A splendid plan, my Baldwin. I will show him what an axman of the Cross can do to traitors. Just smash in his shoulder or gash off an ear—"

"But leave enough for Hugh. And then it is Longlegs's turn. You will take two daggers, Longlegs. A pike-man's dagger for him, and your own jeweled dagger for you. You will make him play, you the most deadly of knife-players in the world. You cut his face, his fingers—"

The Frenchman's ironic mouth twisted in a thin, carmine smile. "I could knife him to goat-meat in a second. A thousand duels I have fought, and seldom have I finished with a scar. To me the traitor shall pay his debt. Knife for knife, Baldwin, and I shall see him bleed from a hundred wounds. A beautiful plan, my-old one. I shall slash the betrayer to—"

"But leaving enough for *me*!" The old Fleming's face was a contorted,

sweat-wet mask, peering hard-eyed through the smoke of his alchemist's jars. "You will leave enough for me, my brave count, and then the turn is mine. Has he not betrayed me more than all the others? Have I not treated him as if he were my own son, urging him to win the lovely Josselin for himself, praying with him at Adhemar's shrine, instructing him in the mysteries of my alchemy? To me he owes the great debt, and I shall kill him. I shall fight him with longswords and smash his befouled weapon from his hand and drive my own blade to his lying heart. And then—"

"And then," the others whispered.

"By then," whispered Baldwin, "it will be dawn. The standard of Arslan the Leopard will be floating in mockery on the north bank of the river by the marsh. The Turks on the Antioch wall will be laughing. They know there will come no knight of the Cross to ride against their champion. The Leopard will laugh. A fine jest. But then he will see a fire. A blaze on the hill near the dead oak tree. For the corpse of the traitorous Briton shall burn; be consumed by the deadly flame of my discovery, the secret of which was carried to Antioch by the traitor but a few hours past. His treacherous body shall burn by that fire, the flame that destroys like God's lightning. I shall take my jars with me to the field where we kill him. We shall pour the new flame on his corpse—"

The flame in the porcelain jar sputtered, and a resinous smoke wreathed the tent. Baldwin of Flanders dropped a hand to his swordhilt and stepped to the center of the floor.

"To his death, my comrades! To the death of Denis the spy!"

Three swords flashed out in the smoke; and catching the glow of the

fire in the jar, the sharp blades shimmered green.

DOWN where the fog writhed in lazy white streamers, over the marsh there came a spectral sound of conflict. A faint disturbance muffled by the mists. The slosh of boots crushing mire. The thud of blows and wheeze of straining breath. A dim jingling and bumping and groaning. But the four who fought there were ghosts in the vapor, the trampled reeds deadened the noise of floundering legs, and the guards on the wall across the river did not hear. Hushed oaths and gasps and stifled panting.

"Less noise there, Raymond, and save the killing for later—"

"Your cloak, in Heaven's name— And quickly, old one, before I break every bone in his spine—"

"Wounds! The ruffian is crushing my arms. Keep his face under water, there, you big Lombard ox. Get the cloak over his head! Aaah! The cur is killing me! Choke him! Smash him on the skull—"

"Blood!" A muffled splash. A steamy bubbling of breath gurgling up through water. The dulled *crunch* of iron smiting flesh. "So! He will lie quiet, now. Longlegs! Quick; help me with this cloak. Do not drown him, Raymond. So! Drag his legs; I have his neck. I thought the dog would never come, and fast we must work for this fog marks the coming of dawn. Pick up his longsword there, Raymond. Hurry—this way—"

Three specters running with a ghost between them. Out of the marsh, and across a muddy bank, and into a scramble of briar. Then through to a road where the mists lurked like escaped steam. Lumbering, heavy-burdened in

the dark fog, the eerie trio carried their captive up the hill, coming at last to the base of an oak that loomed dripping and shiny-black in the vapor. Wind circled the tree and cleared the steam away, and the first, obscure suggestion of daylight discovered the glint of metal weapons propped against the tree-trunk. Two heavy maces, a pair of longswords and knives. Metal gleamed sharply in the damp. Water glistened on the rounded bellies of three big porcelain jars.

"Stand him up there, Longlegs. The dog gains his senses fast. Keep a good hold on his wrists. Ha! He opens his eyes. So, then, Denis of England. Perhaps you are surprised?"

"Baldwin! Raymond! Hugh—" Denis of England shook his head to clear a crimson cloud from his brain. A trickle of blood dribbled from behind one ear and seeped across his naked shoulder. The muscles of the shoulder strained and bulged under the skin as he made a sudden wrench that threw him to his knees. Kneeling so, his arms caught by hands that gripped like a torturer's vise, he glared at the three who stood over him. He saw the face of Baldwin and the face of Raymond and the face of Hugh of Poitiers like three griffin masks glaring down through the wisping haze, and suddenly the tongue went wild in his teeth.

"Blood! It was *you*! You three! You three who trapped me back there in the rushes. Why do you hold me here? By the rood, you, Longlegs, let me go! I—I must report to the council. I—Oh, God—"

THE white-bearded griffin mask swooped down, its eyes winking like little blue stones. The voice that sawed from the beard brought the Briton lunging to his feet. "You re-

port to nobody but us, Denis of England. And to the three of us for the last time—”

“We trapped you, indeed,” Raymond snarled. “Caught you swimming back from Antioch like the thief should always be caught by men of honest heart. You have spied on us, my Briton, for the last time. You have betrayed our plans, sold our lives to the heathen dogs—”

“Fools!” The Briton snapped the word like a whiplash. “You will pay for this night’s mummerly, and be more than sorry, I promise you. Let go, Hugh of Poitiers, or by God’s own—”

“Speak softly, you traitorous swine!” Baldwin clapped a fist over Denis’s writhing lips. “Speak gently when you talk to honorable men. Blood of heaven, that we have let you live this long to soil the air we breathe. But you shall die soon, you traitor, and more honorably than your scheming, black soul deserves. Up against that tree, clapperclaw! And make a prayer to whatever foul god you own. For your body shall be torn only to burn by my fire—the fire you just betrayed to the dogs of Antioch, you rotten-hearted traitor—”

“I am no traitor—”

“But a liar, also!” Hugh of Poitiers scorned. “No traitor, eh? Then what of these mysterious actions of yours these last few months? Aye! And who else but you has betrayed every plan of our army to the Moslem Leopard so that he finds our secrets in the dark and strikes at the heart of our schemes? And I am thinking, too, of how your mount halted our race on this very road when we sped to the rescue of John of Toul. Had you not made sudden halt we might have gained John in time. A scheming, lie-tongued killer and spy—”

“Fools! You will learn to beg forgiveness for these—”

“And what,” Raymond of Lombardy demanded harshly, “were you doing, swimming this river in the dark, consorting with the Turks, sneaking like a leper to hide your movements?”

“A business of my own!” The Briton’s voice shook with passion. “By God’s wounds, when Bohemund hears of this—”

“He will hear no more of your lies!” Hoarse-voiced with fury, Baldwin of Flanders fastened his fingers on the Briton’s throat, pinning him against the tree. “Already you have cursed us too long with your infamy, and now you shall infamously die. Sunrise shall see you slashed and dead; and Arslan the Leopard, when he rides through the marsh by his wall, shall watch your scurvy bones burn. You would not fight the Leopard of Islam, but you shall fight us, clapperclaw, and pay to us the debt of treachery. Aye.

“First Raymond shall fight you. His ax against yours. And because you are a traitor he shall slash the bones of your chest. Then to Hugh you will pay—with daggers. And because you are a liar he will cut the mouth from your face. Then to me, to Baldwin you will pay. And because you are spy I will fight you longsword for longsword, drive the spying eyes out of your head and cut my blade through to your heart. And so no living man must again be cursed by the sight of you, your corpse shall burn to black ashes for the wind to play with and that old Armenian peasant to grind down into his field!”

“Choose, then, your weapon!” Stepping to the tree, the giant Lombard seized the battle axes; held out the hafts. Holding the ax-heads in either fist, he carefully ran a thumb down the

massive blades. "Sharp as lightning," he whispered, "and true. Choose, scum of Briton, and may God take pity on your soul."

DENIS had chosen his mace. For a moment his eyes searched the roots that burrowed through the wet moss at his feet and when they found the tiny twinkle of a green gem there his head came up with a jerk. "I am ready!"

Baldwin of Flanders and Hugh of Poitiers backed away, leaving Lombard and Briton on a carpet of moss three yards distant from the tree. Slowly the warriors circled; slowly; glances meeting and fixed, feet whispering on the damp, green carpet, lips sighing tight-throated breath, their poised axes shimmering above their heads like lightning bolts waiting only the snap of a cord to let them fall. Slowly the two bodies moved.

Raymond the Lombard stooped in a gorilla-like crouch, beard out-thrust like wire, mailed shoulders a-twinkle at every move of the massive, muscle-slabbed back, eyes glittering like polished beads, hairy fists like knots of iron on the taut ax-haft. Denis of England stepping as the panther steps, his naked shoulders and arms tawny and rippling muscles, his face turned to something in stone with stony eyes, lithe hands waiting to whip the mace they clutched in desperate effort to guard the masterful blows that were sure to come.

"Have at you!" With a scalding oath, the Lombard charged. *Smash! Smash! Smash!* Blade against blade, throwing spark-showers up in the dawn-light. Ax on ax, flashing silver fire, whipping, lashing, slashing till the air whistled and rang and the space between the Lombard and the boy was

filled with deafening sound and blinding light.

Hugh of Poitiers screamed and danced. "At him, Raymond! Cut his face! Let the spy be butchered as they butchered John of Toul, his comrade and ours!"

Baldwin of Flanders howled: "Let him feel your mace, Raymond! Again! Cut him again!"

Smash! Smash! Smash! Faster and faster flew the streaks of fire. Sparks burst, scattering lightning. *Clang! Smash!* Raymond's ax smiting down; struck aside by the Briton's fast blade. *Clang!* Like the fracturing of a gong. Toe to toe, axes beating together overhead, arms swinging like the fans of a windmill. Chain mail glowing in the sun.

Bare muscles shining with rain. *Clang!* A spurt of blood from the Briton's white cheek. *Smash!*

No parrying that blow! The Lombard's blade shot down like a bolt from the sky. It sheared through the haft of the Briton's mace, and sent the mace-head flying through the air. Denis cried out; thrown to his knees; a futile stick of wood waving helpless in his numbed hands. Raymond of Lombardy hurled himself forward, ax upraised. But the ax was hung wavering in the dawn-shine. A scream caught it there. A scream that came splitting through the early morning light to strike that scene of conflict into stone. A scream that was echoed by the desperate drumming of hoofs, a furious crashing in the road-hedge behind the dead oak.

Then a horse burst from the underbrush, plunged rearing under the tree. A white-cloaked rider with face of marble and hair of spun gold and eyes that were shining blue flames flung herself from the saddle and dashed

forward, her white hands whipping a sword.

"JOSSELIN!" Four dry tongues chorused the cry.

"Denis!" she screamed. "Fly! Take my horse! Run! Run—" Angels in anger might have looked like that, golden hair blowing, eyes a-blaze, thin sword licking out like a tongue of molten silver. Like a wind she sprang, driving an astonished Lombard before her.

Hugh made a catch at her arm, and the flat of her blade caught his knuckles. Baldwin and Raymond did a dance. "My horse, Denis," she screamed. "Go! Fly—"

"Josselin!" Baldwin of Flanders roared with dismay. "Go away, in God's name! The Briton is a traitor—a spy! Catch her, Raymond! Get that sword! The girl is mad! Stop her—"

"Fly, Denis! Go—"

"Josselin—He is a spy! A—"

"Stay back, Baldwin!" The sword was singing. "Next time I cut!" The white cloak billowed and the gold hair tossed. "Back, all of you! You dogs! Who are you to thus torture a fellow knight, branding him a spy without fair trial? Throw down that ax, Raymond, or I stab! Hurry, Denis, while yet there is time—"

There was no evading that dancing sword-point. Stumbling, floundering, the three knights howled. "You aid a traitor—"

"I love him!" she cried out. "I do not care! I—heard you planning in your tent. Who are you—to stand—in judgment? If traitor he is—then God will punish him—so! You would have tortured him—burned him! Cowards! Three against one! You shall not kill him!" The sword-point twinkled. "You shall not! Thank

God I got here in time. Get away, Denis! Run! No, Baldwin. Stop, or I drive my sword to your heart! Stand, Raymond! Where you are, Hugh! I care not if he is traitor! I love him—love him—"

Perhaps the sun, too, was astonished. It peeped, a big red eye, above the hills of the east, cast shafts of colored light down the misty valley and bathed the hillside with a glow. The stone walls of Antioch were washed with color. The river was a winding silver belt. The mists dissolved in the marshes. On the northern slope where the highway forked the dead oak steamed in an abrupt bath of daylight. A fleet shadow sped under the tree; stopped to snatch a longsword that leaned against the tree-trunk; made a flying leap to the back of a waiting horse.

"Ride, Denis! Ride—"

And Denis of England was riding. The horse cleared the roadway at a bound. A ball of dust rolled back from the pounding hoofs and swept into the eyes of the stunned knights held at bay, gasping and mouthing, against the oak. Their baffled outcry reached the ears of the Briton; and the Briton waved his longsword and shouted a laugh. On the northern rim of the field an old plowman had appeared, plodding behind a crude share.

He had started an oblique furrow down the hill when he saw what was coming, but he never got out of the way. That roan horse was racing like a winter's gale. That half-naked warrior bent low in saddle, his face a gleam beneath a fan of tossing yellow locks, sword whistling over his head, was a doom speeding down on Death's wind. The Armenian's fingers were knotty drumsticks rattling on the handles of his plough, and with a hope-

less cry he dropped sick knees to the fresh-turned clods.

Deep in the heart of Antioch the muezzins chanted the morning prayer, but the singsong drone was drowned by the thunder of the roan's flying hoofs, by Denis's fierce yell, by the old peasant's parrotly screech. The roan horse sprang to clear peasant and plow-share at one leap, but the sword of the Briton lashed down.

Those paralyzed figures posed under the oak at the road saw a scarlet shower spurt high in the air, saw a mangled body roll flopping in a furrow, saw the roan horse wheel and race like a wind down the hill.

CHAPTER VI.

BRITON VS. TURK.

STRAIGHT down that furrow-gashed hill Denis rode, and his mad yell echoed across the valley. Clods spurted from the roan's pounding hoofs. Lightning flashed from the Briton's swinging sword. Half standing in his stirrups he goaded the horse to greater speed, whipped the blade in a shimmering arc above his wind-thrashed hair, and sent an exultant cry pealing down the wind.

The walls of Antioch, the hills far away, the figures at the road-fork picked up the yell in breathless, astounded echo; and so did the rider who came spurring across the field by the marsh. This rider's hauberk glittered and his conical helmet gleamed. A kite-shaped metal shield tossed light on his mailed arm; the beard on his face was a henna flame; a spotted black-and-yellow cloak billowed from his iron shoulders; and a sickle of silver fire was the scimitar swing in his hand.

When the warrior saw the half naked rider protected with nothing but a longsword, he laughed. When he sighted the champion in mail, Denis the Briton laughed, too.

"*Yah!*" screeched the red beard.

"*Yah! Allah—*"

"For St. George and England!" came Denis's screaming answer. "For the Cross, and by God's holy rood—"

Two fierce battle-cries joined in echo down the dawn-drenched hills; then the echo burst into a clang. Poised lithe above his saddle, Denis raced at the enemy with singing sword; the gray wind struck the black-and-yellow splash; the longsword smashed on the scimitar. The horses reared, bucked, plunged in a shrieking tangle; lightning shivered and rang from the blades.

With a dazzling, whipping blade Denis strove to beat down the lashing sickle and drive steel to the red-bearded face. But the Leopard was not named so for nothing. Tossing the heavy shield as if it were made of parchment, returning cut for cut with moon-shaped scimitar, the Turkish champion fended off the Briton's fierce charge, danced his horse, gave a masterful side-leap, and flung in hard against Denis's flank.

The scimitar flickered; and if ever Denis wished himself in armor he wished it then. Both hands on sword-hilt, he slashed to parry the striking sickle. A scalding pain shot up his left arm and blood spouted from his elbow. Teeth clenched, he smashed the longsword down on the shield, and a crimson brook bubbled from the Turk's crushed nose. But the ricocheting blade tangled in spotted leopard-hide, and before Denis could yank free, the scimitar smashed on his shoulder. Only the instinct that threw him over backward saved his left arm from being

sliced clean away. Half blinded with pain, he hung out of saddle in a swirl of blood, thunder and dust.

With a shriek of triumph, Arslan the Leopard closed in. One, two, three the sickle fell, blows coming fast as light. *Clang! Clang! Clang!* as each blow missed the dodging yellow head and found nothing but cold steel. With an effort that wrung from his mouth a cry of agony, Denis swung upright in saddle, eyes streaming, mouth dry, head bursting with the pain of his gashed shoulder. His whole left side seemed to be gone, and the longsword in his hand was a stone-weighted log. Stroke for stroke, blow for blow, he held on, rocking and weaving in his saddle, playing with every ounce of power in his arm to beat off the lashing steel crescent.

THE Leopard's mount would rush. The roan horse would leap to one side. Scimitar and sword would meet, slash and smash in a brief and deafening encounter. Try as he would Denis could not beat down the metal shield, could not pierce through the Moslem's guard and smash the scale armor. He could only swing there, raw and bleeding in a heaving, bounding saddle, and fight off that lightning-fast scythe.

Now the horses were racing in a desperate wheel, the sword in Denis's hand was cumbersome as a jousting-pole, his fist was cotton, his shoulder a blood-scattering flame. The blowing, spotted wings and fiery face came swooping out of the fog with a roar of triumph. Denis swung in saddle; struck out. The longsword missed. The scimitar whizzed past his eyes. The Moslem horse crashed into the roan like a battering ram, and the horses crashed down floundering in a

screaming tangle of plunging hoofs and snapping teeth.

Thrown from saddle, Denis vaulted through dust, landing mouth-down in hoof-trampled mire. Hoofs pounded past his head, and a hundred-weight of mail dropped with a smash on his spine. But the Leopard was half-stunned, too, and with a mighty effort the Briton heaved his fractured shoulder to fling off his enemy.

The Moslem lunged up from his knees with a shout; and Denis was at him with a scream, flailing his blade at the weaving helmet, driving crashing blows at the heaving shield. But the longsword was weakening. The scimitar stroked in a master hand. Weighted with armor, the champion of Antioch might have been at disadvantage against an unwounded man. Now he had only to bide his time; wait for blood to flow.

A moan burst from Denis's teeth. Not long could he stand with that scalding arm dragging him down. The world was black, save for that face of fire and that swinging, deadly moon. The fire-face laughed and the moon zaffed and clanged. Shock and *zang!* on the longsword, and every blow like a knife through his head. Not one man he was fighting, but three. Not three, but a thousand. A thousand faces. A thousand moons.

Reeling and choking, Denis caught the moons on sword-point and tossed them aside.

But every one came back faster, faster, ripping at his chest, razoring at his arm, slicing and slashing past his dripping jaw. Sparks and blood-drops blew past his face. Water washed smarting into his eyes. The moon hung above him and fell. He struck it off. But the curved blade skidded down his sword and crashed

flat on his dying shoulder. *Smash!* The scimitar smote flat on the battered shoulder. In a crimson fountain Denis went down. His knees buckled. His legs and back caved.

Kneeling, he strove to whip the failing longsword. Clouds rolled before his eyes, and a moon sped about in the smoke.

Then something else was there in that moon-wild cloud. A mocking and blinking green eye. A little green eye that winked under a tree of black arms. But the green eye seemed to fade and a voice spoke out of the ringing din. "I love him—love him—"

And where the eye had been there formed a smile.

DENIS of England found a yell deep in his lungs. Denis of England found his feet. He found a longsword good in his hand, and a Turk like a gorilla in armor plunging at him; and he sprang up from his knees with that yell. Arslan the Leopard, rushing to deliver the finishing blow, yelled, too. He had seen no scoffing emerald in the mist; had seen no gem change into a smile; had heard no voice. He only saw a fainting warrior come to life like a revived whirlwind. He saw a lean, grim-jawed Briton, face suddenly aglow beneath its mat of flax hair. He heard a savage cry burst from that face; saw the warrior leap to battle like one insane. Like a maniac tiger, Denis sprang; hurling caution and swordsmanship to the wind. Bloody arm a-dangle, good arm flexing and lunging, head-down, sword flaying the scimitar with a wild criss-cross stroke, Denis flung himself at his foe.

He laughed as he struck down the livid steel moon. He laughed as he brought his sword crashing against the

clanging shield. Leaping and skipping, waving his red arm, ducking his yellow head this way and that in a ghastly dance, he laughed and fought a crimson, mail-clad, cringing demon back down the hill toward the marsh, step for step, blow for blow, till the enemy cried out at every stroke and the air flashed and shook with the sound of laughter and shrieking and smashing steel and whistling breath.

Down the field they battled, and back up the slope. Along the marsh edge where dark water splashed, they slipped and lunged. Stumbling and reeling in the grass. They cried to Allah; cried to God. Driven by a hurricane, the Moslem fell back. Streaming blood from a hundred wounds, head down, Denis pressed on. A flat blade smashed against his chin, but his sword never stopped. The shield was in his face, but he flung it aside with a smashing ripost, and pulped the Moslem's jaw with a ripping slash. Spitting blood, the Leopard rocked back on his heels; whirled and launched a fierce cut at the weaving yellow head.

Bounding to dodge the blow, Denis tangled in the spotted cloak. A moment the Moslem and Briton spun in a frenzied, demoniac whirl, wound together in the leopard-hide, bare chest against iron breast-plate, toe trampling toe, face screaming into face, blades locked overhead. Slowly the muscles bulged in swelling knots on Denis's straining sword-arm. Slowly the longsword pushed back the scimitar. Blue cords bulged down the Moslem's forehead. Steam blew crimson bubbles from his teeth. Stamping, weaving, his left arm trapped in the cloak and fastened against the Briton's mangled shoulder, the Leopard strove to throw the longsword aside.

But the Briton had a leg wound

about the Moslem's knee; a wall of muscle pressed against the breast-plate. Inch by inch the longsword pressed back the sickle; the Moslem's spine bent backwards. Blood welled and seeped down the leopard-hide. The Moslem's face became a twisted, cackling mask. A laugh-burst of savage hilarity sawed through the Briton's clenched teeth. With a last final effort that threatened to tear the gashed shoulder from his body, he brought the sword-blade sliding down the scimitar's curved edge, and drove the cross-hilt slugging into the fiery, contorted face.

With a crash of thrown mail the Leopard hurtled down. The shiny sickle went soaring. The longsword fell like white light. A helmet-topped turnip with sprouting crimson eyes went bouncing across the grass; and Denis of England stooped to wipe clean his blade on a leopard-skin spotted with red.

In the high tower at the east corner of Antioch there rose a terrible cry. "The Leopard! The Leopard is slain—"

Down the valley at the Bridge Gate there burst a stunning reply. A light roared skyward with a blast to shame the red glare of the dawn. A volcano-like eruption of Greek fire that smothered the gate with its thunderous, earth-rocking bellow. As if smashed by magic, gateway and arches tumbled earthward and sank in a pall of bright flame and dust. Masonry ruptured and fell. Wooden beams cracked and collapsed. Antioch shook with the wails of its terrified guardsmen; and a heroic, wild cheer chorused up from the river's north bank. On the bridge there flowed a sudden bright flood of armored men. Blue banners and scarlet went pouring through the breach torn

out of the wall. Godfrey and Bohemund were charging.

BOHEMUND the Mighty was standing; and the council tent waited in silence. The great leader's face, massive under the stack of red-yellow hair, wrinkled in a rare smile as he mounted the dias under the colored lanthorns and turned on the knight summoned there. Generals, lords and barons flashed their furbished blades in salute; and Denis of England was alone ill at ease when the greatest general of all answered with drawn blade, then lowered that blade to rest it on the Briton's bandaged shoulder.

"Seigneurs," the leader rumbled, "with God's help Antioch fell to us this day. All have fought bravely, and well. But to Denis of England goes all honor and all praise, for his courage and might of sword alone could have forged such a broad path to victory. All honor to you, Denis, and praise from the Army of the Cross. Antioch is taken. The Moslem champion lies dead. In spite of my order forbidding you to engage in single combat until Antioch had fallen, you went to the field—"

"Your pardon, sire," Denis bowed, flushing. "I—I could but reply to the challenge when—I—I hastened to your council tent for permission, and found you gone, and—"

"You went to the field," Bohemund roared, "and proved your judgment better than mine. I had not wished the chance of losing so valuable a warrior—but you are not lost. You break my ruling? So! Henceforth you shall make some of your own. To have slain Arslan the Leopard were for us penance enough. But rewarded you must be for your service to the council

in spying out the enemy who betrayed us in our midst, for your work as alchemist and engineer, leading your secret corps of engineers to tunnel under the Bridge Gate wall, undermine the Moslem battlements and plant there your wizard's fire.

"Without your unfailing daring the sappers would never have dared the work. Your wit alone could have timed the fires to burst in the tunnel at dawn and bring the walls caving. It was your plan alone to dig that tunnel in the night, roof the cavern with logs and bring the roof down crashing with your well-timed fire so that the walls above would fall." Bohemund the Mighty bellowed with enthusiasm. "And who but you, Denis of England, discovered the Moslem spy who masqueraded as a peasant and signaled our plans to Antioch by writing them on the hillside with a plow for the guards in their towers to read?"

"Aye," was the humble answer, "but I only guessed it too late, when I should have long before known that no plowman digs crescents and crosses down the side of a hill. I only guessed it that last night we tunneled under Antioch, wondering who it could be that revealed our plans—"

"But the peasant. And you thought out his infamous scheme. All honor, my Denis of England; and the reward of a thousand picked knights to henceforth answer at your word of command." Bohemund the Mighty bowed

his massive head, and chuckled. "But then perhaps there is also a favor or two within my power to grant. Any matter concerning your new-formed command, or, perhaps, a privilege in the way of leave-taking—"

"Sire, since you speak of these things—" Denis's voice was low.

"Aye?"

"Then perhaps I could keep at my side three knights whose tent I have long shared; valiant, honorable warriors guilty of nothing save great zeal for the Cross, and only led to err as I, myself, would have erred under similar circumstances. I beg you, sire, do not hold them in further disgrace. Raymond of Lombardy, Baldwin of Flanders and Hugh—"

"Those three! By my blood! These are odd requests from one nearly slain by their clumsy hands. But, then, it shall be as you wish." Bohemund shrugged twice, and smiled. "You have another foolish request you wish granted?"

"But it is not foolish, my lord—"

"What then?"

"And I am humble in fear that only another may grant it—"

She was lost behind a jostle of shiny shoulders and iron backs, that diminutive white figure with the green gem twinkling at her throat; and loud was the noise of chuckling beards and jingly chain-coats. But she made herself heard. Denis's request was granted.

THE END.



The Sapphire Death

By LORING BRENT

Author of "Sting of the Blue Scorpion,"
"The Master Magician," etc.



The panther whirled on him like a flash

*It would take a superman to conquer the Blue Scorpion—and
Peter the Brazen trained to become that superman*

WHEN Peter Moore, better known throughout the Orient as Peter the Brazen, "murdered" himself in his hotel room in Hong Kong, he provided a neat surprise for the hatchetmen of Mr. Lu, his old enemy. They had been sent to do the job, but when they saw the blood-spattered, disordered room, they knew that someone had beaten them to it. What they did not know was that a man—to all outward appearances a filthy, ragged, starved looking creature like thousands of other white derelicts

stranded in the Orient—had slipped down a rope from the window to the alley outside.

About the time the "murder" was committed, a young woman named Susan O'Gilvie was dancing in the ballroom of a Singapore hotel; dancing with a man whom she did not love, but who she pretended to herself had taken the place of Peter Moore in her life. She had quarreled with Peter because his stubborn pride would not let him marry a girl as wealthy as she was; but in spite of this, her thoughts

were solely upon him rather than upon the handsome aviator, Bill Jameson, who was her dancing partner at the moment. Bill Jameson had just asked her to marry him, but she had put him off.

Susan was startled, all at once, to see beckoning to her from a doorway a young Chinese man whom she had never seen before. Curious, and at the same time half fearful, she excused herself from Bill Jameson.

"Are you Miss Susan O'Gilvie?" asked the strange Chinese when she came up to him on the dark veranda outside.

"Yes."

"I have a message for you.—I am sorry. It is very tragic news. Peter Moore is dead. It was discovered about a half-hour ago. The body was destroyed.—I am an old friend of Mr. Moore's. I repeat: I am very sorry." And bowing, he left her.

Stunned by the news, Susan felt suspicious and at the same time wholly uncertain. Her heart began to thump; and she suddenly ran from the hotel, forgetting Bill Jameson entirely.

As quickly as possible, she went by rickshaw to the jade shop of her Chinese friend, Hing Sing Joy. He, if anyone, would surely know whether or not there was any truth in this horrible rumor.

"Yes, Miss O'Gilvie," he told her. "It's true. The news has just reached me, and there seems to be no doubt. Lin Cho, the opium king of Hong Kong, is responsible for the deed. The body of your lover was destroyed, and that is Lin Cho's method."

But Susan knew, in that instant, that it was not Lin Cho. "No!" she cried hysterically. "It was not Lin Cho. It was the Blue Scorpion—the Mr. Lu whose palace is beneath the

waters of the Lake of the Flying Dragon."

So it was that Susan O'Gilvie bought from Hing Sing Joy for \$200,000 in gold a single piece of information. The tremendous price she paid for this information did not matter to her. Compared with the bulk of her fortune, that \$200,000 was nothing. What counted, for Susan, was the fact that the information which she received in exchange might permit her to avenge the death of Peter Moore. And eagerly she swore to the fearful Hing Sing Joy that no matter what happened to her, she would never disclose to anyone the source of her knowledge.

Hing Sing Joy revealed to her that Mr. Lu, the inhuman monster known as the Blue Scorpion, had established a strange religious cult in the province of Tongking, northern Indo-China. Mr. Lu thus provided himself with an army of loyal fanatics. There was the merest possibility that Susan might reach his person upon the occasion of his single annual public appearance. This was at the time when the infamous ceremony known as the Sapphire Death was performed. For that ceremony Mr. Lu demanded of his followers the sacrifice of the most beautiful of their maidens. Mr. Lu himself would cut her throat. At that one moment in all the year was he alone, except for the maiden whom he would kill. If Susan, with her great beauty, could only . . .

Peter Moore, meanwhile, was on his way toward Mr. Lu's notorious Temple of the Coiled Serpent, where the annual sacrificial ceremony was to take place. None other than the man Lin Cho, the opium king who was credited with Peter's death, had helped him along his journey.

Peter had received from Lin Cho both an amulet and a password—"Tiger of the Night"—which would assist him miraculously; and he had been provided with a private yacht, the Luchow, in the command of one Jim Fong, an escaped river pirate. Ling, a Tonkinese slave, had already effected an astounding transformation in Peter's appearance, and he might now easily pass for a native.

The Blue Scorpion believed Peter Moore to be dead; and there was that much greater chance for Peter Moore to carry out his intention of destroying forever the sinister power that Mr. Lu wielded over all Asia.

(Part II begins here)

CHAPTER VI.

HOPELESS!

HIDING in bayous or behind deserted islands by day, and steaming at top speed during the hours of darkness, the yacht Luchow dropped anchor off the village of Chu-Kiang shortly after dark on the fifth night out of Hong Kong.

In parting with Jim Fong, Peter Moore said to the old river pirate: "Do not let your greed be tempted by the thoughts of quick, big profits. Put down the temptation to slit throats for gold."

The old river wolf grinned. "Master, I have but one thought in mind—to keep a rendezvous six months, three days and eleven hours from this. I will be prudent. My clumsy feet shall follow the paths of virtue. By the whiskers of Buddha, I will not fail!"

A few minutes later, Moore, sitting in the stern of the small boat that took him and Ling ashore, watched the jungle take form in the pale light of

the scimitar moon. The rank, over-ripe scent of flowers and vegetation came to his nostrils. And once again he thrilled to the breath of danger and adventure. Beyond that rising black wall of jungle lay a challenge to the sharpest wits, the highest courage.

The small boat avoided the spidery wharves along the village front; put in a half mile above it. The oarsmen maneuvered it alongside a small pier. Ling and Moore climbed out and waited in the shadow of a mahogany tree until the boat vanished. Then Ling led the way into the jungle along a footpath.

An hour of fast walking brought them into a small clearing. Here, a dozen men with rifles were gathered about a picket-line of horses. A tall, dark fellow with a shock of unruly black hair advanced to meet the newcomers.

He softly called, in Tonkinese, "Who comes?"

Moore answered, "Ren Beh Tung."

The tall man, with rifle ready, looked at him in the moonlight. "Lies fall from the lips of men more fluently than water from a dam in the rainy season. What is the word?"

"Tiger of the Night."

Moore held out the amulet, like a large green lozenge. The tall man rubbed it between thumb and forefinger. Returning it, he bowed low and said, "I am Cheng-Lat. I am the heaven-born's slave. What is his pleasure?"

And Moore said, "We start immediately."

Horses were brought for Moore and Ling, and the cavalcade started south. They climbed up and up until the jungle was left behind. By midnight they had reached a still higher country, of black ravines, many waterfalls and

vegetation of a less tropical nature. Cold winds blew gustily in this region. Actually, they were in the foothills of the Himalayas.

THE cavalcade halted presently under a large banyan tree. Ling reined in his horse beside Moore's and said:

"Master, we part here. Cheng-Lat and I return to join Jim Fong. I will proceed immediately to Hai-Phong to give Lak-Yan, the cobbler, his instructions. You have only five *li* more to go, and that you must go afoot. Follow this trail down the ravine. Watch for the cleft in the hill on the southeast. There, you will see the red star rise. It rises to-night at the hour of the crow. Wait by the great black rock that shines. By the ten thousand and ten epochs of Buddha, may you succeed!"

The young American dismounted. He flipped an airy salute to Ling, and to Cheng-Lat, and waited under the tree until the horsemen had vanished, until the drumming of hoofs had diminished to a faint and faraway tattoo. He waited until this sound had dwindled, and until silence, broken only by the distant murmur of waterfalls, descended.

All about him were black and tortured hills, the result, in some past age, of a titanic upheaval of the earth's crust. Here was utter desolation.

He waited until he was quite sure of his surroundings, until he had the "feel" of the place. He was quite certain that his escape from Hong Kong had been attended by no suspicious circumstance, that his enemies had been completely outwitted. Alone upon this plateau in northern Tongking, he grinned. He saluted the moon. So far, safe! The first step

of his new adventure had been boldly planned and executed. Once again he felt rising within him that tide of excitement and anticipation. He was as free as these winds! Once again, he was on the trail of danger, excitement, adventure!

He started at a fast walk along the twisting, narrow trail in the ravine, drinking in deep lungfuls of the crisp mountain air. His heart sang a song older than the world, younger than the newest dawn. It was as if the meaning and purpose of life had suddenly become clear to him. He saw the ravine as a giant's playground—full of great rocks and boulders. The wind shouted.

As he strode down the ravine, he watched the southeastern rim of the mountains for the V-shaped cleft. It revealed itself at the end of about an hour—a V as clean-cut as if it had been hewn with a cleaver. He turned down a dim, tortuous trail toward it, and presently approached a little round lake as smooth as a mirror, as black as India ink. At the end of the lake a grove of pepper trees tossed about like plumes in the wind and spilled their spicy fragrance.

Just beyond these, at the very edge of the lake, was the grandfather of all rocks—a mass as large as a ten-story office building, as black and glossy as a lump of coal.

The adventurer waited impatiently in the shadow of the rock and fixed his eyes on the V-shaped cleft. His nerves were tingling with anticipation. His heart was thumping.

He waited for perhaps twenty minutes. Then, suddenly, in the very point of the cleft, a spark of orange-red materialized. The red star, Mars.

Quite as suddenly, however, a great cold hand clasped the back of his neck.

Another hand clasped his thigh. Effortless strength lifted him high into the air. A sudden cessation of this strength let him fall with a crash that all but knocked the wind out of him. A yellow giant was on him, twisting his arm, forcing his shoulders to the sharp little stones beside the grandfather of all rocks.

PETER THE BRAZEN writhed, twisted; forced every ounce of his strength into an attempt to free his shoulders from the relentless pressure which was forcing them to the earth. He was helpless. He might have been, with all his strength, at the mercy of some gigantic machine of steel and bronze.

Down went his shoulders, little by little, until the sharp, small stones cut into his flesh.

The mysterious giant who had leaped upon him in the shadow of the black rock then climbed off Moore's inert body and growled, in English, "Terrible! Simply terrible! Come here."

He walked to a shelf of rock which overhung the lake. Panting, Moore followed him. The other man, of about his age, was perhaps three inches taller. He had the magnificent shoulder and the lean hips of a gladiator. His stride was that of the panther.

He paused at the edge of the rock ledge, with the still, black water below him.

"This lake is twenty feet deep," he said. "Deep enough. Here! Grab a rock to hold you under. When I count three, jump. Stay down longer than I do. Jump!"

They jumped simultaneously. The water was icy cold—so cold that once again Peter Moore's breath was all but knocked out of him. He sank down—

down—down into liquid cold blackness, hugging the chunk of rock to his chest.

He began to count seconds. At the count of twenty, his lungs were begging for air. At the count of forty, his lungs were demanding air in no uncertain terms. His heart was pounding. Uneasiness filled him as he recalled how far it was to the surface. He wanted to breathe. He had to breathe. Fifty, fifty-one, fifty-two. He must breathe. He couldn't stay down any longer. It was impossible for any man to stay down any longer. He had been under almost a full minute.

With his lungs frantically demanding air, he let go the rock. He jumped and swam. His head broke the surface.

The yellow giant was not to be seen. Gasping, Moore feebly paddled to shore and pulled himself out, shivering in the crisp night wind. He watched the little lake. He waited. His gaspings ceased. His heart returned to the even tenor of its ways. Still the yellow giant did not appear.

Moore grew worried. Surely this was impossible. No man could stay under water this long and live.

He began to count again. He had been under about a minute. He had been up about a minute when he began to count again. He estimated that altogether five minutes had passed. Still no sign of the yellow giant. Another minute passed.

Then the yellow giant appeared. His head came to the surface. Moonlight gleamed in his black eyes, glittered on his large white teeth. He was laughing. He wasn't gasping with any particular effort.

With strong, slow, easy strokes, he reached the bank and effortlessly pulled himself up.

"How long were you down?" he asked.

"About a minute."

"Quitter!" the giant cried. "You're hopeless! You're terrible!"

Moore said nothing. He watched the drops of water slide off the great, snake-like muscles, the fatless flesh of the other man.

"Rested?" asked the giant.

"Yep," Moore said grimly.

"Come on. Let's see. Let's see how lousy you really are."

With feelings of anger Moore followed him up the bank to the side of the mountain. Here, in a sharp black shadow, was the entrance to a cave. He hadn't noticed it before because of the shadow. The yellow giant went inside. He came out immediately with a pair of gleaming scimitars held in the crook of a mighty elbow. He extended both handles to Peter Moore.

"Both the same, but take your choice."

Moore chose one and gripped the handle. He was not an expert swordsman, but he was not a novice. He placed his left hand behind his back. The yellow giant took the same attitude, facing him.

"Ready?" the giant asked.

"Ready."

The two curved, wicked blades met with a clash. Moore thrust, parried, sidestepped. And suddenly it was as if a powerful hand had snatched his blade. He had played a similar trick on a waterfront bully in Hong Kong, with daggers. That had been skill and strength; this was superhuman skill and superhuman strength.

The scimitar was snatched from his hand as if by an irresistible machine. It went up into the air, and it clattered to the ground.

The yellow giant tossed his own

scimitar to the ground, placed his back to the mountain wall, and began to laugh. He punctuated his bursts of laughter with insults. Peter Moore learned then that he was a weakling, that he was utterly and incurably hopeless.

The young giant reached a crescendo of mirth and mockery.

"And you," he roared, "expect to become the high priest of the Temple of the Coiled Serpent!"

"Yes," Moore said grimly.

CHAPTER VII.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

PETER MOORE had first met Dekka Lan Shan, the yellow giant, in Hong Kong one night about six weeks previously, under circumstances which were not only dramatic but amazing. On the night following Susan O'Gilvie's abrupt exit from his life, Moore had left his hotel to walk until he decided just what was to be done with himself.

His aimless steps took him in the direction of Causeway Bay. In a stinking black alley he had stumbled upon one of those night-time adventures which, in the Far East, may be the beginning or the end of an exciting personal history—a glimpse of mystery seen for an instant—gone forever!

As he walked down the alley, picking his way, he saw, with the aid of some dim effulgence which penetrated the gloom, a thing that appeared to his startled glance to be an octopus on land. There it was writhing and squirming in the mud of the alley just ahead of him, a thing with a great body and countless legs which kicked and writhed.

It had been his experience that Na-

ture, in her most whimsical moment, had never designed a land-going octopus. A further consideration of the many-legged creature presently informed him that what he beheld was a mass of many men attached like leeches to one central figure. A still closer inspection disclosed that one man, down, was being attacked in utter silence by many.

Unlike most street brawls, nothing was being said. There were neither appeals for help nor curses of anguish or fury.

Peter Moore, a participant in many brawls, did not pause to inquire into the causes which had precipitated this one. Automatically, he took sides with the underdog. Fortunately, he had gone for his walk equipped with a strong ironwood walking stick.

With this excellent weapon, he promptly began to crack skulls. So swift and efficient was his work that the seven or eight members of the attacking party were lying unconscious before any of them had had time to realize that there was an intruder.

Moore grasped the tough flannel jacket worn by the intended victim, and half-carrying him, hastened down the alley to the nearest brightly lighted thoroughfare. There, to his astonishment, he found that he had rescued a member of the crew of the U. S. Cruiser California, then on the China station, and at the moment anchored in Hong Kong Harbor.

His astonishment increased when he discovered that the man whom he had rescued was not white, but yellow—a veritable yellow giant, bleeding from a knife wound in his arm, partly unconscious from the blows of fists and feet that had been rained upon him.

The yellow giant, Moore quickly saw, was neither Japanese, Chinese,

nor Indo-Chinese. Despite his wide knowledge of Asians, Moore could not quite place his nationality.

He propped him against a convenient lamp post and knotted his handkerchief about the gashed forearm. His beneficiary, panting for breath, presently recovered it and said, with a deep grunt, "Neat work, guy."

"I'll take you back to your ship," Moore said.

"Nix!" said the big young man. "I'm through with the Navy."

THEN he steadied himself on his two large feet and looked closely at his rescuer. Having completed his inspection, he brushed his big hand across his eyes, as if he were removing cobwebs, and said:

"You're the guy they call Peter the Brazen. This is my lucky night. The same human scorpion who is after you just sent that gang to do me in."

At this use of the word "scorpion," Moore stiffened. Incredible as it was, he understood that the man he had rescued from supposed waterfront thugs was referring to Lu, otherwise the Blue Scorpion, Moore's mortal enemy.

"He got wise I was a gob on the California," the big stranger said, "so I quit the ship. I was on my way to lose myself when this gang jumped me. I'm through with the Navy.—I'm through with everything unless something is done about it right now. I don't know Hong Kong."

"I do," Moore said.

"There's no time to waste, then. I've got to get out of this town."

"Yes," Moore agreed. "What did you do to Lu?"

"It's a long story.—But come on. Those guys are going to take notice pretty quick. Where do we go?"

"A sampan," Moore said. And he led the ex-gob down dark, angling alleys to the waterfront. He knew an old sampan *fokie* who was under a lifelong obligation to him, and who could be depended upon to keep his mouth shut in the very face of death.

The sampan man was asleep. Moore woke him up and instructed him to take them to the middle of the harbor. Here, in comparative safety, the ex-gob told his story. To Moore, it was neither amazing nor incredible, for he had spent his life among men who led amazing and incredible careers—men, like himself, who followed the dangerous and exciting road of adventure.

Dekka Lan Shan was twenty-six years old: He had been born in San Francisco's Chinatown, of Tibetan parents. At the age of fifteen he was shipped to Bombay, and there was met by a number of uncles who escorted him, virtually a prisoner, northward over India and into Tibet.

At Dekka Lan Shan's birth, it had been decreed by grandparents and countless uncles that he was to devote his life to the priesthood. He was taken to the grand lamasery in Lhasa, and there—a boy of fifteen—his training was begun. Very much against his wishes, he took the blood-oath of the lamas. He was initiated into occult mysteries, was given the priceless, age-old secrets of the lamas—yogism. He was trained to perform feats of superhuman strength, and he was trained to acquire powers of mental concentration unknown to others.

Dekka Lan Shan hated it. Born an American, brought up with American ideas and ideals, he hated Tibet; the Tibetans, with their narrow, fanatical views; and most of all, the lamas who crowded into his young brain their priceless secrets.

After five years of it, Dekka made his escape. In themselves his wanderings comprised a fabulous tale. He had made his way afoot from the snow-clad peaks and wind-swept plateaus of Tibet into India. He had joined an elephant caravan into Farther India. He had become a mahout. He had lived always with the threat of recapture hanging over his head, and that would mean death.

Driven by this knife-edged necessity, he visited all parts of the Far East, from Korea to Turkestan. He was a camel boy in the Goblyn Gobi. He was a snake-charmer in Bangkok. He told fortunes and took money from gullible tourists in Singapore.

AND one day he heard of the competition by which the head priest of the most fantastic of all Oriental temples is selected once each year—the Temple of the Coiled Serpent—the temple owned and controlled by Lu, the Blue Scorpion.

Now nothing on earth draws two adventurous young men closer than a common enemy. Many times the cohorts of Mr. Lu had made attempts on Peter Moore's life. Many times they had made similar attempts on the life of Dekka Lan Shan.

Mr. Lu, the mythological monster! The Blue Scorpion, so-called, who lived in a castle built under the waters of a lake cupped in by cobalt hills in the Purple Mountains of the Moon, in northern China!

No man had yet succeeded in disproving the fantastic legends which were told about Lu. He was said to be three hundred years old. At the age of nineteen, he had fallen from a cliff, wiped off his face, smashed his skull and broken most of his bones. A witch-doctor, so the legend ran, had

pieced him together, patched him up, set his bones, given him a brain of purest kingfisher jade in place of the injured brain, and endowed him at the same time with everlasting life or eternal youth—or both!

"Believe it or not," Dekka Lan Shan said that night in the sampan to Peter Moore, "millions of Asiatics believe it. Now let me tell you something about the Temple of the Coiled Serpent, fellow. Of course, you've heard about it. But let me tell you the facts. I fought my way to become the high priest of that temple for a year, and I know 'em all. In an inner shrine in that temple there is a skull made of sapphires.

"That skull is supposed to contain the real brain of Lu—the brain which the surgeon took out of him two hundred-odd years ago, when Lu fell over the cliff. According to the stories, that sapphire skull has magical powers. You can bank on it that Lu spread that story around. Just when the Temple of the Coiled Serpent was built I don't know. Never could find out. But it's been up there in the jungles of Tongking for a good many years.

"Lu saw to it that the fame of the sapphire skull spread. As you know, it's now famous all over Asia. Every year, pilgrims from all over Asia go to the Temple of the Coiled Serpent to see the new head priest selected, and to watch the excitement.

"No matter how phony the legend is, one point is certain: Lu is a wonderful showman. He understands the Oriental imagination. He gives those pilgrims something worth watching! Each year, the new head priest is selected by contests which are supposed to bring out the strength and cleverness of the contestants. The head

priest who is selected has only one job: to guard the sapphire skull.

"It sounded hot, so I decided to try for it. I entered the contests. I won through to the high priesthood and became the guardian of the sapphire skull. That was fine. It kept me out of my uncle's reach for a solid year—and maybe I'd learn some new tricks! But the joke was on me. At the end of the year, a new priest was selected. Then I found that my fate wasn't so funny. I was to go back with Lu to the Lake of the Flying Dragon—and vanish!"

"What!" Peter Moore interrupted.

"That's all. Vanish.—I didn't cotton to the idea. When I vanish, I like to have full charge of the whole act. So I watched my chance and made my getaway. Down came Mr. Lu's wrath! I skipped out of China. I stowed away on a German tramp steamer bound for New York, in ballast. When I reached New York I skipped ship. In New York, Lu's agents tracked me down again. Fellow, I was busier than a flea on a hot griddle! The safest place for me, says I, was to join up with Uncle Sam's Navy. So up I joined. I got my birth certificate, proving my citizenship, from California.

"Right off the bat, my ship was sent out to the China station. What a break! We got here a month ago. And Lu's agents found out about it. I got shore leave to-night, intending to make my getaway, and this gang jumped me. If it hadn't been for you, they'd have nailed me.—Now what?"

PETER MOORE had listened to this narrative, on that night on the waterfront, without excitement, without comment. Not only was he familiar with narratives of that type; in some ways, Dekka Lan Shan's

experiences paralleled his own. One jump ahead of trouble or death all the way!

It wasn't astonishment that made him thoughtful. Dekka Lan Shan had given him an idea.

Peter said, "There's no time to talk now. I'm being watched. Even now, we may be in danger. You've given me a hunch. I'm going to act on it—and kill two birds with one stone. If you'll help me!"

Dekka Lan Shan grinned in the gloom of the sampan's cabin. "According to my code of conduct, fellow," he said, "what you say, I do. My life wouldn't bring much in the open market, but—what can I do for you?"

"So far as I know," Moore had answered, "there's only one route of escape. Up this river. This old *fokie* will take you up there. Does it suggest anything?"

Dekka Lan Shan laughed. "Certainly! Tongking! I know where there's a fine hiding place not a day's walk from the Temple of the Coiled Serpent. Am I a Yogi? Is my guess close?"

"Yes. How do I find that cave?"

"I'll send a man named Ling to guide you. How will we contact?"

"Through Lin Cho, the opium king. He will arrange everything for me. It's an old debt."

Dekka Lan Shan fell to laughing again. "You're what I expected," he said. "You think fast. You jump right down opportunity's throat. So you're going to become—with my assistance—the new head priest of the Temple of the Coiled Serpent?"

Moore said dryly, "You think pretty rapidly yourself."

"Wrong! I am a Yogi. I read men's minds. I am a master of men

and of magic. To-night I become your slave!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MAN OF CHROMIUM.

APPROXIMATELY six weeks later, squatting on the ground in the moonlight outside Dekka Lan Shan's mountain cave in northern Tongking, Dekka gazed obliquely at the blond young American who now passed for a black-haired Chinese. Mirthfully he shook his head.

"Maybe you can, and maybe you can't. All you have is possibilities. To become the high priest of the Temple of the Coiled Serpent, you must become more than a man. What's your plan?"

"To steal the sapphire skull and destroy it!"

"That's a mighty big order." Dekka, looking at him, frowned and gloomily shook his head. "Better men than you have tried that. Most of them died by the death-of-a-thousand-cuts. I'd call it, without hesitation, the riskiest job in the whole of Asia. Sure! By stealing that skull, you could destroy Lu's power over millions of people. The trouble is, it's a super-man-sized idea. Say! Just what is your grievance against Lu?"

"First," Peter answered, "he's been out for me. Now I'm going out for him."

"Sweet revenge, eh?"

"In more senses than one. A few months ago, he ordered one of my friends killed—a man who had done him absolutely no harm. Killed him to throw the fear of God into me."

"Revenge, again. Any more reasons?"

"Plenty! I've been bottled up too

long—trying to be a sensible business man. I've decided to cut loose. I've picked the biggest adventure I could find."

"You certainly have."

Peter was staring at the stars. "And," he said, "it's time someone nipped a few of Lu's schemes in the bud. I'm not talking about the Lu legend. Let that ride. I'm talking about his schemes. He's a menace to civilization."

"I've heard that legend, too."

"It's no legend! I know some of his schemes. He sees himself as the Napoleon, or Caesar, of China. He wants to conquer the world—subdue and smash modern civilization. Rule the universe!"

"Madness!" Dekka snorted.

"Not all of it. He's a genius. I've talked to him when I was his prisoner. He's an inventive genius. I've seen the results of some of his work with a queer kind of remote control radio system, or machine. That's how I met him. He wanted me to work on it. My first job, after perfecting it, was to wreck all the big American cities."

"And you want to give his plans a set-back by destroying his power over Asia."

"It would smash his grip on his followers if I could steal that skull!"

"Yeah. I understand that, fellow. But you've got a worse case of over-ambition than the guy who charged windmills with a wooden spear. It can be done—but you can't do it."

"I'm going to do it."

"Sure! So am I going to jump over the moon! You've got the right spirit, fellow. But here's the hitch. Tough and willing as you are, you're softer than candle-wax. Great grief, Pete! Just look at you! It took me seven seconds to pin you on your back.

I out-stayed you six to one under water. And it took me five seconds to snap the scimitar out of your hand. Don't you realize that it takes a better man than you to win through the contests and become the high priest of that temple?"

"How did you do it?"

"Hah!—Yogism!"

"Horsefeathers! If you did it, I can do it."

"**Y**EAH? Listen, lad. In these contests, you will be up against at least a hundred of the toughest, smartest lads in the whole Far East—human gorillas who have been training for this, some of them, for years—since they were kids. And you expect, with six months' training, to fight your way through a gang like that?"

"Yep."

"Boy, I hand it to you! You are the world's champion optimist. Lu puts on these yearly contests that he may select the smartest, bravest, toughest, strongest men in entire Asia. And the worst of it is, no one knows in advance what these contests are to be. Every year they're different. There's always a fire test and a water test, and there's sure to be an elimination by the sword. On top of that, there is always some new test, personally devised by Lu—something horrible. Different every year.

"The Chinese call you Man of Bronze, but to win through those tests, you've got to change your name to chromium! I can teach you plenty. I can build you up for the elimination tests. I can teach you to walk on coals of fire. All I learned in the lamasery will be helpful. But will it help enough? Nix!

"Look at this with a clear eye, fel-

low. Lu knows you. If he recognizes you—curtains!”

“Yes. I’ve been worried about my eyes. But, first—you’ve actually seen Lu. I never have. What does he look like?”

“I’ve never seen him. No high priest has ever seen him. He remains hidden in a blinding glare of blue light.”

“Well, how about my eyes? How can I make them tilt up at the corners to give me an oriental look?”

“That’s easy. I simply nick a little muscle with a sharp knife—don’t cut it, just nick it. It’s a Yogi trick. Your eyes will twirk up at the outer corners for a week or two, then those muscles will heal and you’ll get back your normal appearance. Such details don’t worry me. It’s the contests! There’s a big chance that you’ll be killed off at the very start of the tests. Those contests are doped out so that they will result in the deaths of great numbers of men. Every year dozens of these lads are killed off like cattle. And suppose you do win? How’re you going to get away with the sapphire skull?”

“I was high priest for a year. I don’t know how it can be done.”

“I’m not worrying about that now,” Peter answered. “The question is, will you help to whip me into condition?”

Dekka Lan Shan looked glumly at the lake. “Sure, I will. And ‘whip’ is the word. You’ll hate the sight of me before we’re through. Because it’s going to be tougher than any course of physical training you ever heard about. We’ve got just six months to prepare you for those contests. Every minute, every second has to count. You’ll have to do what I tell you, without question and without res-

ervation.—It’s time now we got some sleep. Take your clothes off.”

“Where do I sleep?”

“Right out here in the open—without any clothes—without any bedclothes—without anything under you. Right here on these stones! These sharp ones. You’re going to live like a wild animal—and get tough. We’ll kill our own food, and we’ll eat it raw. Good-night! Sweet dreams!”

THUS began Peter Moore’s training for the contests by which he hoped to become, six months from now, the high priest of Mr. Lu’s Temple of the Coiled Serpent. He had always kept himself in excellent physical condition, but he had quickly learned that according to Dekka Lan Shan’s standard he was little more than a weakling.

He could not have undertaken a more rigorous period of training had he been planning to compete for the world’s heavyweight boxing or wrestling championship. Dekka was thorough, and Dekka was heartless. The time would come when Peter would be able to sleep comfortably naked, and with no mattress or covering on the sharp stones; but for the first few nights he suffered agonies from the cold, and other agonies from the little pointed stones.

On the morning following his arrival, his training systematically began. Having finally slept, he did not wake up until the sun was high in the heavens. Dekka was seated beside him, devouring raw the meat of a deer he had killed with a rock sling.

“Pile in!” Dekka invited him. “Tear off a hunk of the neck meat. It’s bloodier, and it has more of what you need.”

With distaste, Peter tried it. He

ate little of that first raw meal. Later, hunger would drive him to it. But not this morning.

Stiff and sore from those hours on the rocks, he went through the day's routine as Dekka dictated it. A swim; further attempts at staying under water longer than a minute; a run, barefoot, along the stony trails; mountain climbing; wrestling; ju-jitsu; scimitar practice; rope-jumping; *parang* practice. A *parang* is a Malayan dagger about ten inches in length, with a tapering curved blade—one of the most dangerous edged weapons in existence. In addition to these exertions, Dekka taught him the Yogi breathing exercises—exhaling through one nostril, inhaling through the other while he concentrated on the “flame in his heart.” This was a mysterious ritual, but Peter soon found that it was tremendously effective. It cleared his brain and refreshed his heart and his tired muscles.

Night found him exhausted—another night in the chill, gusty wind, with nothing over him but the stars. But as the days passed, he lost his stiffness and soreness, and he set himself in every way to attain physical perfection.

He walked and ran miles each day, barefoot over the sharp stones. The soles of his feet soon became calloused, and so tough that he could leap from a height of twelve or fifteen feet onto sharp stones without pain or discomfort. With this and his barefoot cross-country runs, Dekka began to prepare him for fire walking.

“I will not be satisfied,” said Dekka, “until you can walk without pain over an acre of burning coals.”

“No matter how calloused they were, one's feet could never stand that,” Peter protested.

“Do what I tell you and you will not be burned.”

“Black magic,” Peter said.

“Yogism,” Dekka corrected him.

While Peter was busy with other activities which did not require Dekka's presence, the young Tibetan roamed far afield in search of herbs. When he had secured the necessary herbs, he made a stew of them, then strained off the leaves and roots, leaving a thick, dark green liquor. With this he massaged Peter's feet and hands morning and night. It was a secret formula, known only to the Yogis, for toughening the skin.

WHEN Dekka considered that Peter's feet were tough enough, the preliminaries to fire walking were begun. Peter walked over sharp stones, later over heated pebbles, next over areas of burning twigs, and finally over hot coals.

To be sure, from beginning to end, all of this stretched over almost the entire period of six months, as his feet grew tougher and tougher.

Walking over white hot coals was one of the most amazing sensations he had ever known. He did not feel the heat in his feet at all. The hairs of his calves were singed and scorched off, but his feet felt no pain.

“Yogism!” Dekka declared triumphantly. But by that time Peter had ceased questioning or doubting Dekka's magic.

Another of Dekka's magical formulas was a thin, aromatic, purple liquid. Peter believed that it was derived chiefly from a reddish-purple flower which grew in cracks high up on the mountainsides, and from a resinous gum secured in the jungles. With this liquid Dekka massaged him every morning. The results were almost in-

credible. A few seconds after the stuff had been rubbed in, Peter's skin began to itch and burn. This itching and burning presently communicated itself to his muscles and, it seemed, to all of his veins. The sensation produced in his brain was one of intense irritability, verging almost on anger—a kind of chemical indignation. The treatment made him restless, and at any stint, it made him difficult to overcome. In wrestling, ju-jitsu and swordsmanship, it made him somehow more determined; and it was building up a feeling of fierceness in him which Dekka was counting on.

At least two hours of every evening were spent in perfecting Peter's command of Tonkinese. He must be able to use the language with the fluency of a native Tongking, because he must present himself to the priest in charge of the contests as a native of Asia, from some particular town or city, and he must be prepared to answer questions relating to family, occupation, and the like.

Arrangements for Peter's family background were now being made by the faithful Ling. A humble cobbler, in Hai-Phong, under an old debt to Peter, would be mentioned as Peter's father; and Peter had spent enough time in Hai-Phong to answer all questions concerning that busy Oriental port with fluency.

He was not worried on that score. It was solely the difficulty of whipping himself into suitable shape physically which gave him his pessimistic moments.

Yet at the end of his first month of training, it is doubtful if any pugilist had ever been in better fighting trim than was Peter Moore. His muscles had grown massive and tough. There was a new clearness in his eyes, a new

alertness in his brain. The time came, even by the end of the second month, when he was no longer an easy match for Dekka. He made Dekka work harder to pin his shoulders to the ground.

His swordsmanship was improving. And he could now remain submerged in the lake upwards of two and a half minutes.

In spite of that, he was not progressing rapidly enough to please Dekka. Dekka never complimented him. Dekka was never satisfied. He constantly said that he did not believe Peter could make the grade.

EACH morning when Peter awoke on his bed of sharp stones, Dekka had some fresh surprise for him. Once it was a panther. Another time it was a pair of king cobras. Peter was to learn to fight, not only men, but all manner of jungle beasts.

Peter never did learn how Dekka captured these animals. Dekka, with a wise look in his wide-set, high black eyes, would always say:

"Yogism."

"Hypnotism?"

"Call it whatever you want."

"You don't catch them with your bare hands!"

"It's a gift, lad."

Whatever it was, it was effective. The panther, for example, was roped to one of the pepper trees—a leaping, bawling, snarling yellow monster. But its nails had been clipped to the quick!

"How did you do it?" Peter asked.

With that mocking look in his eyes, Dekka answered merely, "Yogism!"

The panther, he explained, was for a friendly little bout. "I clipped his claws so he couldn't hook your entrails out. His teeth are up to you. Look at those fangs, fellow!"

Peter was looking. That panther might have been a saber-toothed tiger.

"Do I fight him with bare hands?"

"Not quite. You use a ten-inch ebony club."

Dekka fearlessly approached the panther and untied the rope at the tree. The panther snarled and bawled, but it made no attempt to tackle Dekka. It did not seem afraid of Dekka, yet it made no attempt to hurt him.

It was a cold morning, but Peter was already perspiring. Dekka led the panther up a mountain trail. At the top was a small plateau, and in the center of this was a cup-shaped depression, a geological freak. The pit thus formed was about fifteen feet in diameter and nine feet deep, with sheer sides.

Peter stared down into it with misgivings.

"The stunt," Dekka explained cheerfully, "is this. I push old hell-fire in from one side, and the minute he jumps in, you jump in from the other side with your club. May the best animal win!"

Peter looked at the little ebony club which Dekka had given him. He gripped his lower lip in his teeth. He had any normal man's respect for a dangerous cat animal. He did not see how he could possibly escape from that pit without losing at least a limb. But he did not back down. One glimpse of Dekka's malicious grin sent the blood pounding angrily into his brain; more blood, as if at command, went racing into his chest and arm muscles until he could feel them swell and harden.

"Ready!" Dekka cried.

"Ready!" Peter snarled, and gripped the club.

His memories of that encounter in the pit with the fresh-caught panther

were always a little hazy. Dekka gave the animal a hearty shove. As the panther leaped into the pit, Peter jumped down.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SUPERMAN.

FACE to face with horrible yellow eyes, Peter struck out with the club. The panther roared and leaped back. Its back crashed against the pit wall. It rebounded, sweeping its long, powerful forearms like great hooks, the purpose of this being to sweep the man into an embrace, to claw him to shreds with the powerful hind feet, and to tear the rest of him to ribbons with those enormous yellow fangs.

What Peter remembered perhaps most vividly was the strong stench of the cat animal.

Before the beast could sweep him into that deadly embrace, Peter was delivering nicely timed, powerful blows with the short club.

The panther leaped away; leaped back, always with that sickening scooping motion.

Above the beast's savage screaming, Peter heard Dekka's booming laughter.

A tooth that looked, close up, as large as an elephant's tusk, raked Peter's shoulder. Down came the club. Another scream. Another backing away. Another scrimmage. Horrible yellow confusion.

At close quarters, Peter brought the club down with savage energy three times. The panther sagged. Glazed eyes peered at Peter from drooping lids.

"Climb out," Dekka ordered.

Peter did so.

"Well?" he said, slapping blood from the gouge on his shoulder.

"Lousy!" Dekka said. "Supposing I hadn't clipped his claws? You'll have to do better than that."

In his strange, savage heart, Dekka enjoyed these contests hugely. To him, they were full repayment for all his labors. And there were many strange contests. During the six months, Peter fought nine or ten panthers, and the claws of the last five were not clipped. There were savage brown bears, there were wild boars with vicious tusks.

Dekka said he selected the bears because of their savage slyness, their unexpected modes of attack; the boars to teach Peter footwork. Peter had always heard that a man facing a wild boar is facing one of the most dangerous of all wild animals. After a few bouts with boars, he preferred panthers. The boars were swift, not so clever as the bears, but possessed of a maniacal intent to kill. His only escape when a boar charged was to leap into the air—to strike with the club as he leaped.

The Tibetan, lounging at the top of the pit, watched with huge enjoyment Peter's mad dances as he avoided the charging boar.

The bears were savagely dangerous foes, too. Their little eyes would turn almost blood-red as the fight progressed; and they would vary their attacks so swiftly, so cunningly, that on several occasions Peter was almost defeated.

Quite as dangerous a foe was the python. Peter learned not to be so much afraid of their steely coils as of their hammer heads. They used their heads as a man uses his fists—drawing them back swiftly, striking with the speed of lightning and the power

of a battering ram. One such blow might readily crush a man's skull. You had to work fast with a python.

BUT the cobras were the worst of all. Peter awoke one morning to find Dekka sitting cross-legged beside him with two cobras coiling about him. They were roaming over Dekka's naked anatomy, yet he was apparently unconcerned.

Peter, staring at these, the deadliest of all known reptiles, suddenly tasted a discharge of electricity from his teeth and felt the hairs at his nape bristle, while icy chills having nothing to do with the dawn wind rollicked down his spine.

"I won't fight those!" Peter protested.

"The hell you won't!—But don't worry, fellow. You'll fight this one. He's been de-fanged. We'll save the other fellow for later. It's a case of 'Pete be nimble, Pete be quick, or Pete will join the dead or the sick.'"

"Where'd you get them?"

"Jungle," laconically.

"How?"

The invariable answer, "Yogism, my lad!"

"How do I fight them?"

"Small pit. *Parang*." Dekka arose and slung the snakes about his neck as carelessly as a woman adjusts a fur piece. "I've dug the pit."

Peter followed him along the lake to where Dekka had made a small, box-shaped excavation. It was no more than six feet square and about four feet in depth. The cobras seemed to be eight feet long, but were hardly five.

"The trick is this. The cobra and you will go in, as usual, at the same time. I will strike the cobra with a switch to make him sore. He will

think that you did it. He will attack you. What could be simpler?"

"Yeah," Peter dryly agreed, "but it's really a game for small children."

"You hold the *parang* point down, as if you were going to stab yourself in the stomach," Dekka explained.

"All you have to do is strike it into the base of his brain, just after you have dodged his lunge. Ready?"

Peter grunted. "Be sure you toss in the de-fanged one. I may be slow at first."

"Ready?" Dekka roared.

"Ready!"

Peter grasped the *parang* and jumped as the writhing black snake fell into the pit. Dekka, leaning down, struck it sharply on the hood with a leafy branch cut from one of the pepper trees.

The great hood of the serpent was swollen. Venomous little green eyes focused a split-second on Peter Moore, then the wickedest of all snakes launched its attack. In the open, a cobra is dangerous, for the cobra is the one serpent inhabiting the earth which will follow a man—aggressively attack him. This infuriated specimen was cornered, and madly he coiled and struck, coiled and struck, coiled and struck; so rapidly and with such horrible accuracy that Peter was paralyzed. Had he struck at the snake, he surely would have stabbed himself.

DEKKA did not laugh this morning. He watched, and in a monotonous voice, counted off the seconds.

At the thirty-fifth second, Peter struck the cobra at the base of the hood and the fight was over.

Climbing out, he met Dekka's scornful glare and withering criticism. "If that snake had not been de-fanged, you

would have been dying for the past thirty-two seconds. You must learn to be nimble. You must learn speed—speed!"

"Shall I go up against cobras in the contests?"

"You may."

"Let's see how fast you are!"

"You bet!—And this fellow is not de-fanged. Give me that *parang*."

Peter relinquished the *parang*. Dekka tossed the cobra into the pit. He struck it with the switch, threw the switch aside—jumped!

The instant his heels struck the bottom of the pit, the cobra struck. Peter watched breathlessly—and felt sick with discouragement at Dekka's wonderful agility.

The wicked curved steel blade in Dekka's hand came down like a flicker of light as the cobra sprang. The swollen hood, with the writhing black snake behind it, dangled—as if on a roasting spit—from the point of the *parang*!

"Just like that!" Dekka said lightly as he climbed out of that pit of horrors. "Easy does it."

"I'll try it again," Peter said grimly.

"Are you telling me?" the young Tibetan jeered.

A FEW days later, Peter went into the pit again with another cobra, likewise de-fanged. This time he killed it in twelve seconds—ten seconds too late. But that was better than thirty-two seconds. On subsequent mornings he bettered that record. The time came when Dekka trusted him in the pit with a cobra from which neither fangs nor poison sac had been removed. The instant the reptile, with bloated hood, struck, Peter brought the *parang* down in a

swift, sure thrust—and instantly killed the snake.

"Good!" Dekka shouted.

That was the first word of commendation he had given Peter since this fantastic period of training had begun, over five months previously. But Peter was neither thrilled nor gratified. He had come to grasp the meaning behind Dekka's jeering attitude. Dekka had had a terrific time, he said, in winning that contest to the high priesthood.

Therefore, if Peter could not beat him in any contest, what was the good of Peter's entering the contests?"

"But I am as fast and as strong as I can ever be," Peter said disconsolately. "In the past month I haven't improved. I can hold my own with you in almost any contest—but what of that?"

"Yes," Dekka agreed. "What of it?"

"What am I to do?"

"Wait. That's all. It will happen or it won't happen. Something inside of you."

"Yogism?" Peter said skeptically.

"Nope. Yourself. Your powers of coördination. They haven't clicked yet. If it doesn't happen, you'll stay as you are. If it does happen, you'll know it. That's all.—A click. But it hasn't happened yet."

It sounded vaguely logical, and at the same time it sounded fantastic. In all his life, Peter had never approached such perfect physical condition as he had now achieved. In any form of combat he was virtually tireless. He could run miles, climb mountains, swim for hours, fight any of the animals which Dekka magically produced, or even fight Dekka himself, without perceptible fatigue. He enjoyed what few men in the world ever enjoy—a

full realization of his physical possibilities. His body was a magnificent machine now. The muscles under his satiny, golden skin were like lazy snakes—ready on the instant to meet any challenge. He was hard, tough, yet not the least muscle-bound or over-trained. Dekka's magical massages attended to that.

In spite of his perfection, Peter was no more than Dekka's equal. At wrestling, he was a match for Dekka. At free-for-all fighting—without weapons—he won as often as he lost. His swordsmanship had improved tremendously, as had his use of the *parang*.

With Peter's improvement, they had taken to using dulled blades and crude armor made of wild bullock hide which covered their chests and abdomens. They wore masks of hardened hide.

It was inevitable that in the more savage of these contests both men suffered innumerable slashes on the arms and legs, even when dulled blades were used.

These cuts were healed overnight by an application of Dekka's magic-working herbs.

By the beginning of the sixth month, Peter could hold his own with Dekka in all forms of combat. Once, Peter would have been delighted with such progress. Now he was disgusted, for he knew that equaling Dekka was not enough; he must excel in every form of combat.

IT lacked about a week of the full six months' training period when, one morning, Peter was aware of a curious sensation which took place simultaneously in every part of his body. It was as if, suddenly, a strange chemical had been added to those of which he was composed. As far as his brain

was concerned, it took the form of a sharp and amazing clarity, a sense of unbounded vitality. In that same moment, it was as if his muscles were suddenly filled with a strange, exciting new vigor.

In all his life, he had never experienced such a sensation.

At the moment when it occurred, he and Dekka were fighting—a free-for-all. No holds were barred. Anything was fair—hands, elbows, feet, teeth and knees. Peter had been trying to master a feat of Dekka's which had eluded him all along. It was an attack with the feet—hurling the body, feet foremost, through the air, striking at the opponent's head and chest with the soles of the feet. It was a dangerous maneuver for the other fellow, if it was carried out successfully, for the soles of their feet were now almost as hard as rock. A blow struck by a foot so hardened was like a blow from a club.

The new sensation occurred in Peter Moore just as Dekka launched himself through the air. Instead of attempting to sidestep, which was the prescribed defense for such an attack, Peter held his ground. As the Tibetan came hurtling through the air, Peter grabbed each foot. He stiffened his powerful shoulder and back muscles. His biceps stood out like coiling snakes. He heaved.

Dekka went sailing on over his head, high in the air. He landed with a thump on his back, gave a terrific grunt, leaped up and came charging with blazing eyes.

Peter grasped his shoulders. With a sudden heave, he again sent the Tibetan hurtling through the air. Then he closed in. Blows by fists and feet rained on him. He seemed not to feel them. It was as if he had tapped a

source of unlimited strength, of inexhaustible endurance. Closing in, with swift blows of his fists, he knocked Dekka unconscious.

When Dekka recovered his faculties, he looked at Peter strangely. "Get the scimitars!" he growled.

Peter got the scimitars, and they put on their hide armor. In six seconds, Peter disarmed Dekka.

"Now the *parangs*," Dekka panted.

It was the same with the *parangs*. They had hardly closed on each other, when Dekka's *parang* went sailing through the air and clattered to the stones.

"Tired?" Dekka gasped.

"No."

"How's your wind?"

"Okay."

"Come on!"

They went to the lake, dived in.

Peter went to the bottom and began counting. Even at the end of five full minutes, on a second-by-second count, his lungs did not frantically demand air. He stayed under four hundred and twenty-five seconds—five seconds over a full seven minutes—before he let go his rock and rose slowly to the surface.

His lungs were not bursting, his heart was not hammering.

Dekka was sitting on the shore, a wry grin on his face.

The young Tibetan brought up his hand to his right temple in a salute.

"You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din," he said. "It has happened—I saw it happen in your eyes. You're now fit to enter the contests. Maybe you'll win, maybe you won't. But you'll make them know they've been in a battle. I've done all I can for you. You're a superman, Pete. The question is—will I meet you aboard the Luchow—or will I have the

job of burning incense over your corpse?"

CHAPTER X.

TEMPLE OF THE COILED SERPENT.

SEVEN miles to the west of Dekka's cave, at the foot of the mountains, was a jungle road which led to the Temple of the Coiled Serpent. When Peter came down from the mountains, this road was thronged with pilgrims, all traveling in the direction of the temple. To-morrow the fun would begin; that is to say, the elimination contests to determine who would be the new high priest would get under way.

Orientalists do not take their temple festivities solemnly. To them, such occasions are holidays. Lu, the genius, knew this, and took full advantage of it. The pilgrims to his temple were going to have wonderful fun, watching men slaughter each other—and later, the sacrifice of a beautiful girl.

With a woven-reed package slung over his shoulder, Peter joined the throng. Most of these pilgrims were from southeastern Asia—Siam, Malaya, Cambodia—but there was a sprinkling of Burmese, East Indians and islanders.

Barefoot, wearing nothing but a deerhide loin covering, Peter strode along the road toward his greatest adventure. His muscles were like spring steel. His eyes were as clear as sapphires. His body had long since ceased to need artificial stain, so tanned was he from head to foot. Dekka had shaved and stained his eyebrows, lashes and hair, had "nicked" the little muscle which gave his outer eye corners an upward twirk, so making him look definitely Oriental. After a

week or two, Dekka declared, his eyes would lose that Oriental look and would resume their normal appearance. As for the color of his eyes, Peter had agreed with Dekka that he need not worry, for many Orientals betrayed distant white ancestry by their gray or grayish-blue eyes.

Peter did not permit himself to think of the dangers which lay ahead. It is hard to be in any sense a pessimist when healthy blood is fairly roaring through one's veins. His feeling of tirelessness, of illimitable strength, gave him a sense of zest that was almost intoxicating.

People along that well-traveled road stared at him. Many of them asked, in almost as many languages, "Do you enter the contests?" Among them were bright-eyed young women, traveling with their parents, some with amahs—the Oriental equivalent of American chaperones. Some of the pilgrims were afoot. Others rode donkeys or horses; and whole families rode in two-wheeled carts drawn by oxen or donkeys. A privileged few traveled in supreme Oriental state—on gayly caparisoned elephants.

The reek of strong Oriental perfumes rose from most of the young women. They were in their brightest holiday finery—silks from the hand looms of the Irriwaddi, sarongs from Java, bright jackets and short skirts. Vivid colors—emerald green, royal purple, sapphire blue, blood red, yellow and orange, clothed—or partly clothed—their golden-brown bodies. A happy, singing throng.

PETER fell in with an old fellow from Saigon who was limping along with the aid of a staff. The old man had snow-white hair and a patriarchal snowy beard.

His little black eyes stared at Peter's magnificent shoulders, inspected his powerful biceps, ran on down his lean hard body to his powerful legs.

"Are you entering the contests?" he asked, in Tonkinese.

"Yes, father."

"Blessings of Lu!—Blessings of Buddha!"

"A hundred ripe years to you, father!"

But a cloud had passed over Peter's fine optimism. Blessings of Lu! That master charlatan!

They climbed a rise in the road. Suddenly, in a hollow in the hills below them, the Temple of the Coiled Serpent materialized, as if, by some trick of Oriental magic, where there had been nothing was suddenly reared an architectural monstrosity of blue stone. The structure fairly took Peter's breath away. It was terrific, fantastic, grotesque, obscene.

It stood on an eminence a hundred feet above the surrounding jungle; a natural or artificial hill measuring at least three-quarters of a mile across at the summit. On this eminence, this plateau, stood the most infamous, most notorious of all Oriental temples. An architectural replica, on a gigantic scale, of a coiled snake.

Flat coil on flat coil, it rose up into the amethystine sky, each coil perhaps forty feet in diameter, and of pale blue stone so intricately laid that the individual stones could not be detected. Twenty of these monstrous coils!

Descending the hill toward it, Peter counted them. Twenty times forty! Approximately, eight hundred feet into the sky the Temple of the Coiled Serpent reared its fascinating ugliness. Eight hundred feet above the artificial plateau poised the gigantic and incredible head of the stone monster, its

mouth agape, its titanic fangs exposed, its eyes glittering. These eyes were composed of great sheets of precious stones, glittering and gleaming with all the evil of those cobras' eyes which Dekka had tossed into the pit for Peter to fight.

It was almost unbelievable, the close similarity of this coiled solid mass of stone to the vicious jungle serpent after which it had been copied on such a gigantic scale.

Had it been a live snake, it would have stretched out, uncoiled, to a length of over thirty miles!

About the circular base, on the plateau on which the temple stood, roved lean and hungry black leopards—guardians of the temple door! They were ringed in by a fence of tall bronze spears set in a masonry floor. And about this ring was another ring where countless people roved about, staring at the temple and watching the leopards.

This whole arrangement became more understandable under closer inspection. The base of the temple was circular. Surrounding the base was the circular fence of bronze spears. In the ring-shaped space between temple wall and fence roved the black leopards. And in the outer ring-shaped space, which extended to the edge of the plateau, the public—the pilgrims—were free to roam. A dozen stairways of white marble led up the slope of the hill to this plateau.

Peter, staring, thought: "In that temple—in the very heart of it—is the sapphire skull. Shall I succeed in stealing it?"

Again he wondered what the skull contained. Dekka did not know. Dekka had spent a year with that skull, and he did not believe it had an opening. To tamper with that skull, of

course, meant instant death. And Dekka had not then been courting death.

CHAPTER XI.

THE GLADIATORS.

AS Peter descended the hill, other wonders developed. The greatest of these was an arena. Dekka had mentioned it, but Peter was not prepared for its magnificence. The stadium was of white stone—perhaps white marble—white as snow against the deep, lush green of the surrounding jungle. Within, once the pilgrims had comfortably seated themselves, the priesthood contests would be held.

In the small and large clearings all about the hill on which the monstrous temple stood were small structures of stone and wood. At first Peter thought that these, in imitation of the great Buddhistic pagodas, notably the Schwe Dagon in Rangoon, were smaller shrines. They proved, on closer acquaintance, to be *salas*—rest houses, where the pilgrims lived during the time consumed by the contests and the ceremonies.

Again he returned his eyes to the temple, to the plateau on which it stood. There must have been at least thirty black leopards in that ring-shaped enclosure. Except for secret, underground entrances, no man could enter the temple, under the present arrangements, without climbing over the high bronze fence and crossing the leopard enclosure. The spot was as practical as it was fantastic. A man who ventured into the leopard enclosure would be swiftly annihilated by those savage, starving black beasts.

Peter followed the crowd and ascended the hill to the round plateau. The area between the leopard enclosure

and the edge of the hill was wider than he had estimated. Thousands of pilgrims could stand here and watch the ceremonies.

Through the bars, he studied the temple entrance. It was a huge arch, easily one hundred feet in height by two hundred in width. A bronze grille covered the opening, so that the leopards could not intrude into the temple. Beyond this grille, within the temple, was a round pit in which charcoal smoldered. Glancing at it, Peter shuddered.

Into this pit the dead girl whose throat Lu had cut, at the climax of the ceremonies, was to be thrown by the newly appointed high priest!

Men in flame-red robes moved about the pit of fire.

Peter wrenched his eyes away, still shuddering. He was standing near a wide gate, now closed, which gave upon the leopard compound and faced the temple entrance. Approximately halfway between this gate and the temple entrance was a perfectly round pool of water about six feet in diameter. He presumed that this was the leopards' drinking water. Dekka had not mentioned it. But Dekka had warned him that each year there were many changes, many innovations.

He returned his eyes to the pit of fire. Beyond this pit the famous marble stairway began. From where Peter stood, he could easily see to the top of it—one thousand and one marble steps which led to the platform on which Lu, the Blue Scorpion, sat within comfortable view of his thousands of worshipful subjects.

The last of Peter's optimism ebbed away. For a moment, the folly of his expedition forcibly impressed itself upon him. Changed as he was, wouldn't Mr. Lu recognize him?

Then his courage, his feeling of exuberant recklessness returned. Nothing, he vowed, would prevent him from taking his revenge on Mr. Lu!

FROM Dekka Peter Moore had learned what he must do now.

He must present himself to the retiring head priest and announce his intention of entering the contests.

The contestants lived apart from the other pilgrims, in a large teakwood *sala* on the western side of the temple mound. Peter found this *sala* without difficulty. It was filled with young Orientals. Most of them, like himself, were clear-eyed, tall, wide-shouldered, muscular young men—men in the pink of condition.

In the center of the *sala*, Peter found the head priest, a man no older than himself, a young Chinese who somewhat resembled Dekka. He was several inches taller than Peter, and he had a physique which reminded Peter of pictures he had seen of Roman warriors.

Shrewd dark eyes scrutinized Peter. These eyes ran from his forehead to his ankles. Firm lips parted to reveal

large white teeth. He said, in Tonkinese, "You are a contestant?"

"Yes."

"You are aware of the dangers?"

"Yes."

The eyes hardened a little. "Last year, of one hundred and nine men who entered, seventy-three were killed. This year, the contests are even more dangerous. Do you still wish to enter?"

"Yes."

"What is your name?"

"Lak-Ching."

"What is your city?"

"Hai-Phong."

The high priest wrote these answers on a sheet of parchment.

"Who is your father?"

"Lak-Yan."

"Occupation?"

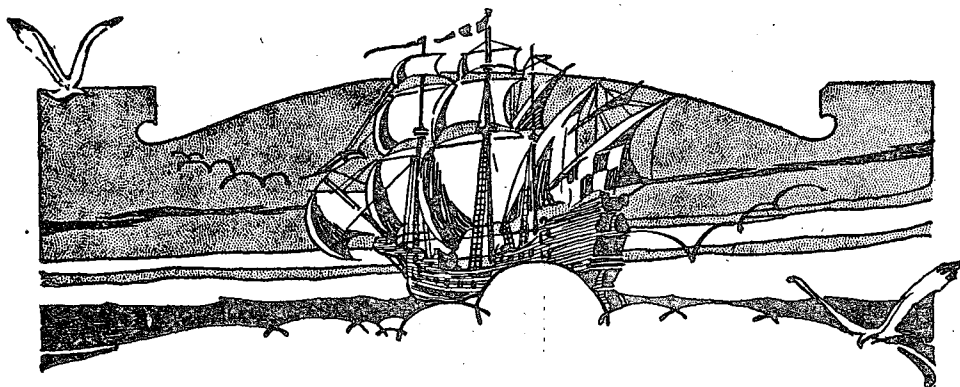
"Cobbler."

"Your occupation?"

"Cobbler's apprentice."

The high priest asked other questions, rapidly, as if he were interested in Hai-Phong. Peter answered them glibly; but his heart was beating a little more rapidly than was normal. He was entering the first danger zone.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.





The Hillmen tied him hand and foot

The Man from Poonch

By TALBOT MUNDY

Nine conspirators were perched high above India like hawks ready to swoop—and just as ready to pounce on the man they suspected as a spy

IT was chilly and dark at the back of Daldeen Lal's place. The distant lights of Simla, glimpsed now and then through a fluke in the mist, served to emphasize the loneliness and darkness. Nine men, scarcely visible to one another, squatted on the creaking balcony.

Yussuf Aroun raised a floor-board, using his toe for the purpose, and spat into eight hundred feet of dark nothing beneath him; it was less trouble than raising his head above the sheet of corrugated iron which broke the cold wind from the Himalayas. He

spat with the emphasis of a Pathan who had made up his mind.

"By Allah and by my beard, all men from Poónch," he said, "are sons of impudently unchaste mothers."

But the man from Poonch said nothing. He was at the end of the balcony, with his back toward Simla and his face toward eight suspicious, hostile men. The solitary lantern cast a red glow on as much of his face as was not hidden in the horse-blanket that draped his head and shoulders. It touched, too, the silvery hilt of his long knife.

His eyes held the smouldering wrath of a panther's. When he rolled himself a cigarette his tongue licked the edges of the paper as if tasting in advance difficulties that he knew how to enjoy. The most exciting challenge in the world is silence, and the man from Poonch seemed made of the intolerable stuff.

Seven shadows, that were Hillmen of seven unrelated blood-strains but with a language, a creed and some hatreds in common, stirred a little as their host rose. Water splashed in the darkness beneath. The wooden balcony squeaked as it swayed to the wind and the weight of Daldeen Lal's cat-like footsteps, careful not to touch men as he passed them. He opened his house-door, entered, and shut it behind him swiftly; the light from it shone on some of the faces, for a moment. They were hook-nosed men in stinking sheep-skin jackets — black-bearded, with oily love-locks.

One laughed with a nervous high pitch:

"By Allah, men from Poonch can take a dive into the mist beneath us, just as easily as men from better places! What say you, brothers?"

Yussuf Aroun answered, deep-throated, deliberate:

"Nay! If he is false, a spy for the British, I slay him, because it is I who first suspected him and said so. By my beard, he shall die as many deaths in that case as he can draw breaths between a midnight and a midnight. He shall beg for the edge of a knife to cut him free from torment."

But the man from Poonch continued to say nothing. The door opened again and Daldeen Lal squirmed himself through like a cat:

"A fool wanted the loan of a bicycle pump," he said. "I told him he

could push his bicycle." He sat down. "Now about this man from Poonch—"

WHEN Daldeen Lal spoke Push-tu he abominably mispronounced it, and he knew the mispronunciation irritated those intolerant Hillmen, who despised him and his Hindu religion. That he made a point of not being religious merely increased their contempt. It was much more difficult for them to treat him civilly, than for him to endure their arrogance. But they shared his secret; and the secret gave him an authority that he did not choose to hazard by talking more than necessary. So he paused in his speech.

"Who believes such a tale as he tells?" asked Yussuf Aroun. "Taught him to fly in Ameliki, did they — he having made the Amelikins think he was one of themselves? Eh? Allah! I saw an Amelikin; he wore spectacles: he had a fat wife who found fault. He was less like this man than a horse is like a camel. Saucy and abominable are the men from Poonch, and I say this one is a liar. How do we know he can fly an air-ee-o-per-lane? Why won't he tell us his name?"

The moon rose, revealing the tops of deodars in the ghostly white mist that streamed in the valley beneath. It silvered a wet crag that projected from the side of the ravine a hundred yards away.

"But somebody must fly for us," said Daldeen Lal. "His is a probable story. Many besides he have been imprisoned for being suspected persons possessing pistol and no license. While he was in prison his family died of neglect and want, because the money-lender foreclosed. Is there anything unlikely about that? Why should he

not seek vengeance on the British?"

"Allah! I doubt him," said Yussuf Aroun.

The man from Poonch spoke then, rather gutturally, in a strong voice that suggested self-imposed calm, rising slowly to his feet and revealing contempt with unexaggerated gesture:

"I have heard women who talked more manfully." He took a stride toward the door. "Whoever craves a fight with me may have it." He met each gaze in turn. None flinched. His eyes lingered on Yussuf Aroun's, and he touched his knife-hilt, but not even Yussuf Aroun made an answering move. With a sideways jerk of his head he indicated the moon-lit crag that glistened over the ravine. "I will sit yonder and think thoughts while ye belch fears."

He opened the door slowly, stood framed in the glow from within—a rather tall man with the loose-limbed stance and insolently careless poise of an experienced fighter—and then stepped suddenly into the passage, shut the door firmly, and listened, with his hand on the latch.

Not a man on the balcony spoke, but he felt pressure on the latch. He removed his hand. As the latch yielded he kicked the door. It slammed in Daldeen Lal's face, hurling him backward. The teeth of the other men gleamed in the sudden light like wolves' fangs, but no word was spoken. The man from Poonch shut the door again and strode along the lamp-lit passage, tossing two pice slipper-money to the lame Kashmiri at the outer door.

OUTSIDE in the garden he listened again, but no sound followed him. There were dense streams of blown mist, but the moon-

light shone in broken streams of silver that revealed the pathway leading from the ramshackle house. He followed it through a gate amid shadowy trees, and where it forked toward the road that leads to Simla he took the right-hand track and squatted, in the full light of the moon, on the wet crag that overhung the ravine.

Torn shreds of fluffy mist blew past him, but he could see and be seen from Daldeen Lal's balcony; and he could see the shadowy road to Simla, where it curved to avoid the rising ground, some fifty feet away, and a shadowy man with an upturned bicycle appeared to be examining a punctured tire. The man with the bicycle called to him in Hindustanee:

"Oh you! Where can I borrow a pump to put air in my leaking tire?"

"I don't know," said the man from Poonch.

"Also my lamp has gone out. Where can I get oil and matches?"

"I don't know."

"Will you watch my bicycle, if I leave it while I go to find a pump?"

"No."

"I would come back quickly."

He from Poonch turned away and stared at the ravine, not answering. So the man with the bicycle set his machine upright and began pushing it along the road toward Simla. But very soon the sound of his footsteps ceased. He appeared to be riding the thing. His bell rang—*one, two—one, two, three—one, two*, as if it might be a signal. The man from Poonch appeared not to notice that. He sat still, staring downward at the mist that flowed like frosted cotton through the tops of deodars, until at last the lame Kashmiri came from the house and said hoarsely that Daldeen Lal would like to speak to him.

"Tell him I sicken of too much speech," he answered.

Ten minutes later Daldeen Lal, in a thick shawl and a belted khaki overcoat, came, carefully avoiding moonlight, and stood waist-deep in mist in the shadow beneath the crag between it and the road.

"Is it true then that all the men from Poonch are mules?" he demanded. "Pray be reasonable. Who would admit you to such a secret as ours without proof of your trustworthiness? They are ready to kill you now unless you give proof, since you already know too much. Had it not been for me, Yussuf Aroun would already have shot you as you sit here. You offended him. His finger itches for the trigger."

The man from Poonch smiled. "It is I who lack proof," he retorted. "A life is not much. But shall I risk mine for perched hens who scratch lice and cackle?"

"Tell me truly who you are," said Daldeen Lal. "If you will give me references—"

"God knows who I am. God knows who you are. And that is enough."

"If I thought you were a spy," said Daldeen Lal, "there would already be no flesh on your bones. Your skeleton would be rotting among rats in a dark hole."

The man from Poonch answered with an air of indifference: "I am a spy. I spy for deeds, and a chance to do them. Therefore I will get hence. When I die, it shall not be of too much talking."

"IT is true," said Daldeen Lal, "that speech is sometimes valueless.

And you impress me as a man of strong resolution. But I have to convince those others. They will not con-

sent to telling you our secret unless you first give a pledge."

"I have nothing."

"Your life?"

"It is worth nothing."

"Put it then into our hands, and we will tell you our secret. We will not trust you otherwise. At the moment, Yussuf Aroun has you covered with his rifle, and if I should signal to him—"

The man from Poonch dropped as if shot, and as he fell near Daldeen Lal's feet, there came the sharp, dead smack of a rifle in mist. A bullet whizzed overhead, but there was so much spacious silence that the sound died swallowed in a moment. The man from Poonch stood up with his back to the rock and spoke calmly:

"I saw you make that signal. Now I will kill you as well as Yussuf Aroun! Or will you tell me your secret?"

"In the others' presence I will tell it." Daldeen Lal turned up the path to the house in a hurry, plainly disliking that talk about death. The man from Poonch removed an iron bracelet from his wrist and tossed it to the road. It fell in dust in moonlight. The man on a bicycle, pedalling back from the direction of Simla, got off his machine and called out:

"Have you seen my spanner? I believe I dropped it where. I tried to mend a puncture just now. Ah! Ah! I see it!" He picked up something, mounted and returned by the way he had come.

"May your luck be as flat as your tire, you voice out of a sepulchre!" Daldeen Lal called after him, hurrying toward the dim lamplight at the front door.

The man from Poonch followed him into the house and through it, out on

to the balcony, where he met the gaze of Yussuf Aroun.

"If you can't shoot any straighter than that," remarked the man from Poonch, "your women must be anybody's. Or are they too ill-favored to tempt your betters?"

"I will eat your liver," Yussuf Aroun answered, showing splendid yellow teeth.

"No spy would dare to speak as he does," said Daldeen Lal. "Would a spy return here, after being shot at? I intend to tell him our secret in the presence of you all. But you are not to trust him. Mind that. Two of you—better yet, three must watch him day and night, one sleeping and two waking."

"Let him give us his knife," said Yussuf Aroun.

The man from Poonch looked calmly at him. "You may have it in your belly," he answered.

"Allah!" Yussuf Aroun's hand went to his own knife.

"Peace!" exclaimed Daldeen Lal. "Of what use would a coward be to us? He is good. Shall I tell him now?"

The man from Poonch laughed curtly: "I will say what I know already. There is haste, and you need an airman, but there is none, unless you accept me. You are afraid. And now what?"

"That proves it. He has spied on us," said Yussuf Aroun.

The man from Poonch looked sideways at him: "I mistook this," he said, "for a women's *jirga*, not believing men could be such chatterers. Allah! Who needs more than one eye to read fear on a Pathan's face?"

"Tell him," said Yussuf Aroun. "Let him learn what fear is. If he fails us or betrays us, I will answer

for it. He shall not be out of my sight until all is finished. And then he and I; *insh'allah*, will decide the matter of our honor!"

THE man from Poonch went and sat beside Yussuf Aroun insolently. Hands on knives, they eyed each other sideways. Daldeen Lal shifted the lantern and sat with his back to the mountains. He cleared his throat importantly.

"This is no hysterical conspiracy of students," he began. "We intend to break the English this time, all or nothing. A major calamity at this opportune moment ought to stagger them and stiffen revolutionists of all types. But it must be astonishing—staggering. It must be the impossible thing, that nevertheless happens. Otherwise the English will rally as usual and in some way survive it because of their organization. We must destroy the English system, as the Bolsheviks first destroyed the system of the Czar. And in the anarchy that follows we will reap our harvest."

"There will be loot," said Yussuf Aroun. "*Wallahi!*"

A cloud of mist shut down on them, so dense that it shut off the moonlight and blanketed sound. It was like being at sea on a swaying deck. The lantern in the midst only made a dim blur. Daldeen Lal coughed and raised his voice:

"The viceroy and all the members of his council are to meet at Delhi, three days from now. The governors of five provinces will be there, along with eleven ruling princes, to say nothing of innumerable subordinates. A bomb—"

"A poison-gas bomb!" Yussuf Aroun interrupted "Allah!"

"Such a bomb," said Daldeen Lal,

"as will infallibly kill all of them!" He rubbed the palms of his hands together.

"As infallibly, by God, as I will kill you if you fail!" said Yussuf Aroun. All the other men on the balcony moved like vultures on a ledge that smell blood on the wind.

Daldeen Lal's face, as he leaned forward, glowed in the lantern-light. His breath steamed like a devil's in a Tibetan painting.

"Cruelty," he said, "is waste of energy, and it is too unfortunate we could not make a poison-gas to kill them instantly. The ingredients for that were not obtainable. We had to use a gas of the corrosive type that burns the membrane. It is so potent, that one part of it to ten thousand parts of air produce death; and so corrosive, that we dare not mix it in readiness. There are three principal ingredients. For the sake of secrecy those have been produced in places very far apart, by experts trained in European laboratories. Each ingredient is sealed in a gas-tight but fragile container; and the three containers are enclosed in one bomb. When the bomb falls, it will smash the containers. The resulting mixture will escape, assisted by a little nitroglycerine to crack the casing. And whoever breathes any of that—however little of it—will be dead within ten or fifteen minutes—I regret to add, painfully."

"Pain," said Yussuf Aroun, "is all that kaffirs will ever know of Allah's mercy!"

The man from Poonch rolled a cigarette and licked the paper thoughtfully. "Fire!" he demanded. Yussuf Aroun, startled, struck a match for him and grinned spitefully across the flame that they sheltered together between cupped hands. The man from

Poonch blew out the match. "You stink," he remarked. "Keep your distance."

"You must believe in your lucky star," said Yussuf Aroun.

THE chill of the mist was penetrating. Daldeen Lal shuddered as he cleared his throat again. "The essential thing," he said, "is timing—to drop the bomb in the right place at the proper moment. The difficulty is, to do that in spite of a cordon of troops and scores of special policemen. You see, there have been so many acts of terrorism lately that the viceroy and his council will be guarded like golden money. We foresaw that. That is why you were selected and encouraged to approach us."

A bearded face beneath a gunny-sack thrust itself into the lamp-light. "*Bismillah!* Hear the fool boast! It was I—I tell you, I who lay under the air-bombs when Bulteel *sahib* brought his planes across the Indus and wrecked our village, slaying eighteen including my son—it was I, Mahomed Sayyid, I who thought of it. I said, by Allah, said I—"

"Thou art like a cock that has laid an egg," remarked Yussuf Aroun. "It were better to slit thy throat than listen to the crowing."

Daldeen Lal resumed his discourse: "We are not suspected. The C.I.D. doesn't know us. None of us has ever been connected with a crime. Our finger-prints are unrecorded—unless yours are?" He stared hard at the man from Poonch, but drew no answer.

He continued: "Even so, however, it would be impossible, even for us, who are not suspected, to carry a bomb weighing over a thousand pounds, through the crowd and through the

viceroys' guard — although we did think of dressing the bomb to resemble a man bleeding to death in an ambulance. But if that had succeeded, its explosion would have meant our own death." He paused dramatically. "But an airplane—"

The man from Poonch extinguished the butt of his cigarette against the damp floor-board. Daldeen Lal continued:

"One of us—no matter who—owns a repair shop—buys second-hand automobiles—is a good mechanic—studied aeronautics in Germany—possesses copies of all the airplane specifications that are constantly published by various governments. He has had two years in which to build a monoplane, secretly, using four second-hand automobile engines, which he adapted. We needed speed, not radius. The plane can rise easily and swiftly with the weight of the bomb and one man. It carries fuel for only fifty miles, but that is plenty. In minutest detail the machine is theoretically perfect for its task. There is a secret and perfectly level runway of two hundred yards between high walls. The machine can be in the air in a moment, and in Delhi in another moment. There will be havoc—panic—death."

"And after that?" the man from Poonch asked.

"We of the North will have our innings then," said Yussuf Aroun. "By Allah, we will sweep India as a storm sweeps orchards!"

Daldeen Lal smiled in the glow of the lantern. "At first, there will be a little anarchy," he conceded. "That is perhaps not a bad thing, to make men welcome a new government. A little slaughter—a little frightfulness—and then peace."

"Such is the way of God," said

some one, looming through the mist near Yussuf Aroun.

"AFTER the bomb is dropped, then what next?" the man from Poonch demanded.

Daldeen Lal stared. "Come to earth and escape, of course. There will be such panic and confusion that escape should be simple enough. But burn the plane, if possible, because of finger-marks."

"And has this plane been flown yet?" asked the man from Poonch.

"No. Of course not. How could it be? It is a great enough marvel to have built it undetected. It is tuned, as I think they call it. It has taxied along the runway once quite recently, but that made too much noise to be risked a second time. It has never been up in the air, but it is theoretically—"

"It is written that it shall not fail," said Yussuf Aroun. "It is also written, thou from Poonch, that thou art to fly the thing. Thereafter, if all goes well, I will take back all I said about our honor and we shall be good friends. But fail, and thy lucky star will have set forever, as a star that falls dead in the sky."

"All of us will trust you afterwards, when the great deed is done," said Daldeen Lal. "He has a knife," he added.

Yussuf Aroun drove a sudden elbow against the jaw of the man from Poonch, forcing his head back with a jerk. He snatched the knife, laughing with a sort of high-pitched yelp of triumph as he sent it spinning into the mist. "Now sit still, or I will gut thee ere thy time comes!"

So the man from Poonch sat glaring but extremely still while the Pathan's hands searched him for hidden

weapons. After that, three of the other Hillmen tied him hand and foot. They threw a blanket over him. They left him. Daldeen Lal lingered and whispered:

"Trust me and never mind them! Do your part well. After that, if you wish, you shall die of drink and women! Don't fear that dog of a Pathan."

There was no answer. The man from Poonch lay still beneath the blanket. "Perhaps you would like some friend to know where you are?" Daldeen Lal asked. "Tell me his name. I will send the message. That will give you greater confidence in me."

But there was no answer—no movement. The creak of the balcony, wind and the splash of water down in the ravine were the only sounds.

"There will be five thousand rupees for you afterwards," said Daldeen Lal. "Suppose you crash? If you are killed, who is to have your money?"

Suddenly he screamed. He smothered the scream in his shawl, but it was too late; a Hillman hurried out through the door with a lantern.

"He bit me! He bit me! Krishna!" Daldeen Lal wrung his right hand and kicked at the blanket savagely, but the man from Poonch ducked his head and sat upright, snarling, his eyes like embers in the darkness:

"Curse your black soul and your money!" he said deliberately. "May the one eat the other and corrupt you into worms in the belly of endless time!"

He lay down again. The Hillman re-spread the blanket, nodding:

"He is good. He will make us no trouble at all. His kind have the courage of Allah in them." He grinned at

the blood on Daldeen Lal's finger and then led the way into the house.

FOR a long time after that the man from Poonch lay very still beneath the blanket, while within the house there was a conference, extremely difficult to overhear because of the creaking of wood in the wind and the hollow noises that came upward out of the ravine.

Yussuf Aroun, followed by two other men, came out at last. He kicked the blanket.

"Awake! By Allah, now we test thy star and thy honor! Loose him, brothers. If he craves my knife-edge, let him tempt me!"

But the man from Poonch seemed dazed, or perhaps indifferent. He let himself be raised to his feet, offering no protest when Yussuf Aroun and another man put arms behind his back and held hands. They pressed him close, pinning his arms to his sides; and the third man followed, almost equally close.

"There is no escape," said Yussuf Aroun. "Fail, and the devil gets thee! Do well, and I am thy friend forever! Hey-yeh! As a mother-bird teaches the fledgeling, thou shalt teach me to fly — afterwards — afterwards — me! But Allah is Lord of Afterwards!"

Out into the darkness, then, Daldeen Lal and the rest of the group following at cautious intervals, one at a time.

Across the shadowy road, then downward into a sea of dark tree-tops, in which the mist hung like snow and, when they reached it, changed into wet gems twinkling in moonlight. Ferns and their smell. The feel of the floor of a forest spread with moss, pine-trash, rotting twigs.

On downward, and forever down-

ward, hour after hour, by paths such as cats and pheasants know, crossing and re-crossing a winding post-road, drenched by the shoulder-high rhododendrons, out through the mist into silvery moonlight and the warm air stealing upward tainted by lowland dust.

At last the railway junction. It swarmed even before daylight with dark-skinned and bright-turbaned oddments from a hundred unrelated human breeds, to whom a train is an adventure, and time nothing.

There was a smell of steam, oil, sweat, spices. The cries of sweetmeat vendors. The drone of ten languages spoken at once, like the laughter of water on gravel.

Extremely obvious policemen pretending not to notice well-known faces in the lamplight. The scream of a frightened woman separated from her man.

Near the booking-office entrance, a man with a bicycle, tired and even sleepy but volubly indignant with a railway police *naik* for refusing to hold the machine while he bought himself a ticket.

"A Bahinchute, am I?" he shouted, as the man from Poonch went by shoving through the crowd between two heavy-shouldered Hillmen. "I will not rest until I have made you eat that word! I will follow you with my hatred until you shall swear the world is nothing but eyes that scorch your soul!"

"Out of the way!" said Yussuf Aroun, shoving him. That brought him face to face with Daldeen Lal, who almost fell over the bicycle, barking his shins and maliciously siding with the *naik*.

"Kick him! He hunts women all night long. His trick is to ask for a

bicycle pump, that he may rob the fool who lends it to him!"

THEN the train, and the surge, in half-darkness, for seats in third-class carriages already crammed to bursting. Squatting on the floor between two Hillmen, the man from Poonch traced patterns with his heels in the mud that his slippers had collected on wet hillsides.

"I have a knife, remember," Yussuf Aroun whispered. "It can reach thy liver as a woman's glance reaches a lover's manhood. So beware of tricks. Sit still. Say nothing. Let me see where thy hands are at all times!"

So the man from Poonch sat in the stifling heat, seeing nothing but legs and fruit-peel, except when the compartment door opened at stations. Then, with the draught of fresher air there would be a glimpse, between coppery legs, of the station *bhisti* with his sharp cry and clattering brass cups. Then a policeman would come and stare in.

Twenty times before Delhi was reached the man from Poonch looked straight into a policeman's eyes—sometimes into the eyes of an English police officer. But he never moved or made any sign; he could feel the point of Yussuf Aroun's knife at his shoulder-blades. The policemen seemed uninterested. They stared, slammed the door shut and passed on along the train to continue inspection.

All the talk among the passengers was of the great affair in Delhi, two days hence now: the opening of the great assembly, with the known risk of a clash between Hindu and Moslem. No two opinions were alike, but there was only one expectation—of trouble, red, reckless. When the train reached

Delhi it was a rather silent crowd that poured forth to the platform. Anticipation held men by the throats and excitement smothered natural emotions, for the moment.

Yussuf Aroun shepherded the man from Poonch along the teeming platform, observant but not noticeably nervous until a man behind him, showing a bicycle, rang to invite him to make way—*one, two—one, two, three—one, two.*

"*Haie*, you Pathan! You are not in your hills! When bells ring, that means 'Be quick!'"

Yussuf Aroun swore like a startled bear then. The man with the bicycle laughed. His little round embroidered cap made him look monkey-impudent. "Take care. You are not in your hills. I will summon my friends to teach you what to do when bells ring!"

Yussuf Aroun made a swipe at him with a hairy fist, but he ducked and hurried until he was presently lost in the crowd. Then, presently, a swarming, clanging tramcar and the delirious heat and movement of city streets in lamplit darkness—stink, din, tumult and an ever deepening feel of tension, on the way toward teeming suburbs, past groups of special police and military posts at the throats of dark streets plunging into unguessable slums.

"By Allah, this city was built to be plundered!" said Yussuf Aroun. "Do thy task, thou of Poonch! Thou of Poonch, be sure and sudden! We others will not fail. Allah!"

One, two—one, two, three—one, two. A bicycle bell rang when they left the tramcar to plunge on foot down zigzag alleys. But there were scores of bicycles; they flitted like bats in all directions. On through a shadowy, stinking maze, whose dark-

ness felt like one vast eye, whose silence whispered. Stars seen against sheeted harems on flat roofs. They threaded a devious course too swift for legs cramped by the long railway journey, but when the man from Poonch lagged he was threatened:

"Allah! Is it a spur thou needest?"

DALDEEN LAL was leading. There were glimpses of him, at moments, at corners. The other men followed at careless intervals, one by one, independently, until at last Daldeen Lal fumbled at a gate in a wall and passed through. The man from Poonch was thrust through after him, into an ebony shadow beneath a parallelogram that was a purple street of stars—the roof of a pair of apparently endless high walls.

"Lo, the runway!" said Yussuf Aroun. He stretched out his left arm. "Day after to-morrow, that way lies thy road to hell or heaven!"

The remainder of the party filed in, one after another, some invisible watchman taking word and sign, countersign, and some other mysterious signal.

"Allah! It is true that good thieves sleep in gun-rooms," said Yussuf Aroun. "There is a police *khana* half a stone's throw yonder, and beyond that stands a prison! Nevertheless, lo and behold, the runway; and who knows of it save God and we ourselves! It is now three months since the air-ee-o-per-lane was ready. But a man to ride it—We have slain three. It was I who slew them. Three vain boasters who were offered a chance to fly to hell or heaven failed us for one reason or another. Poonchling, it is thy turn! Let me see thee examine this wonder."

Daldeen Lal—a voice, a vague sen-

sation in the dark—spoke urgently: "Thou from Poonch, now listen. I will show you."

Yussuf Aroun shoved him. "Lead on, and turn on a light! Let me watch him take hold. By Allah, as a woman knows a man by his eye, I know a horseman by the way he looks at a horse from a mile off. And a bird-man is as easy. Lead on!"

Pavement, between walls. An iron roof. A sliding corrugated-iron door, opening silently—shut again with a thud. Metal on metal. A man stumbling amid tin cans, cursed for a clumsy rat by Yussuf Aroun. The Pathan was excited; he gripped the arm of the man from Poonch with fingers like a trap's jaws. Sudden electric light and—

"Is it good, thou Poonchling? It is good, by Allah! Is it not good?"

It looked perfect, even to the paint—new-born like a dragon-fly, beneath a makeshift crane, amid shadows etched on white walls. Four engines—a stream-line pattern that should make a falcon jealous—gold-and-aluminum, with black walnut propellers—white tires on gold-and-aluminum wheels—stainless steel wiring—a bomb, torpedo-shaped, snug as a roe in a herring—

Ting-ting — ting-ting-ting — ting-ting! It was the bicycle bell.

Crack! The left fist of the man from Poonch shot a half-hook upward at the peak of Yussuf Aroun's jaw. The Pathan reeled on his heels; his hand went to his knife. The fist struck him again—again. A right went to his solar plexus. The roof split, like a packing-case coming apart, and the light went out. The man from Poonch felt a head in the dark and punched it—found another head—cracked both together—fell, he and two others, on top of Yussuf Aroun. There was a

sudden spitting-cracker-cat-fight of teeth, oaths, knives—in the dark—in a din. Then star-light—flash-light—a command in English:

"Grab him! Don't be afraid to kill him! That's the style! Light, somebody! Light here! Two more men here! Come on, two more!"

SOMEBODY found the switch. The full light went on. Thirty-two policemen, bearded, beautiful with sweat and malice and the gun-crew grin that viewed a shot square on the target.

The bicyclist of the round embroidered cap, mud spattered on his loose white loin-cloth, let himself be pulled from under Daldeen Lal, fingering his ear; there was blood on it from Daldeen Lal's teeth.

"Pip, pip!" he remarked as he felt himself for injuries.

The man from Poonch, rubbing a raw knee, laughed at him. "All right, Moti? Not hurt? That was neat work. Timed it beautifully. Where's Charley?"

Almost casually, from the outer darkness, bleeding a little and bruised in places, a smiling Englishman in shorts and shirt, made his way through the police to the man who might have been from Poonch.

"Got 'em all!" the newcomer remarked. "Got each last one of 'em!" He passed a flask. "I thought you might need a spot of this."

There were gurgles. "Thanks. You always were thoughtful." Somehow that man no longer looked as if he came from Poonch. He glanced at the wings of the plane that loomed above him. "This ought to cause a sensation. What?"

Charley's eyes met his in silent laughter. "Might have been serious,

Grayson, mightn't it? I'll have to get the high explosives section of the C. I. D. to come and draw the teeth of that egg.

"You're tired, old man. Hungry? How about a tub, then the club and some dinner? We can make out reports together after dinner."

Yussuf Aroun, handcuffed and snarling between dark-eyed Sikh constables, spat some blood from his teeth and swore a streak of Northwest frontier blasphemy:

"I knew that Poonch tale was a lie! Another second and thy liver should have lain like—"

He who, it now appeared, undoubtedly was not from Poonch, looked at his barked knuckles. Then his eye sought the flask.

"Give my friend Yussuf a drink," he suggested. "He's quite a character. I hit him a bit harder than was necessary. Yes, then I'm ready when you are. Dinner? I've forgotten what good food tastes like."

THE END.



A Yankee Amazon

OF all the sagas of women fighters from the Greek Amazons down to the most modern woman pilot in Russia's Red army, the story of "Robert Shurtlieff" is of most interest to Americans.

Deborah Sampson was born in Plympton, Mass., on Dec. 17, 1760. She came of sturdy pioneer farming stock, old records showing that she was directly descended from the colonial heroes, John Alden and Miles Standish.

When the revolution began she disguised herself as a man and joined the 4th Massachusetts Regiment under Col. William Shepard, adopting for the purpose the name of Robert Shurtlieff.

In 1776 she was mustered in at Worcester and joined the Army at West Point. She served on equal terms in the ranks, first as private and later as sergeant, for the remaining years of the war. None, until the very end, suspected her sex.

"Robert" was badly wounded at Tarrytown, suffering a severe bayonet wound in the scalp and a bullet in her right thigh. Treated in hospital she hid the fact of the bullet wound from the doctor, fearing lest her imposture be discovered. Secretly at night she extracted the bullet from her own leg without anæsthesia and without once crying out! In three days she was back in her regiment in the lines.

A fever epidemic near the close of the war caused her undoing. She fainted in the ranks and Dr. C. T. Binney examined her. The facts were discovered and Deborah Sampson was brought before a tribunal headed by General Patterson. At the inquiry this amazing girl, a modern amazon who had fought courageously in hand-to-hand combat with Hessians and British regulars, broke down and wept piteously because she could no longer fight for liberty!

C. B. W. Richardson.

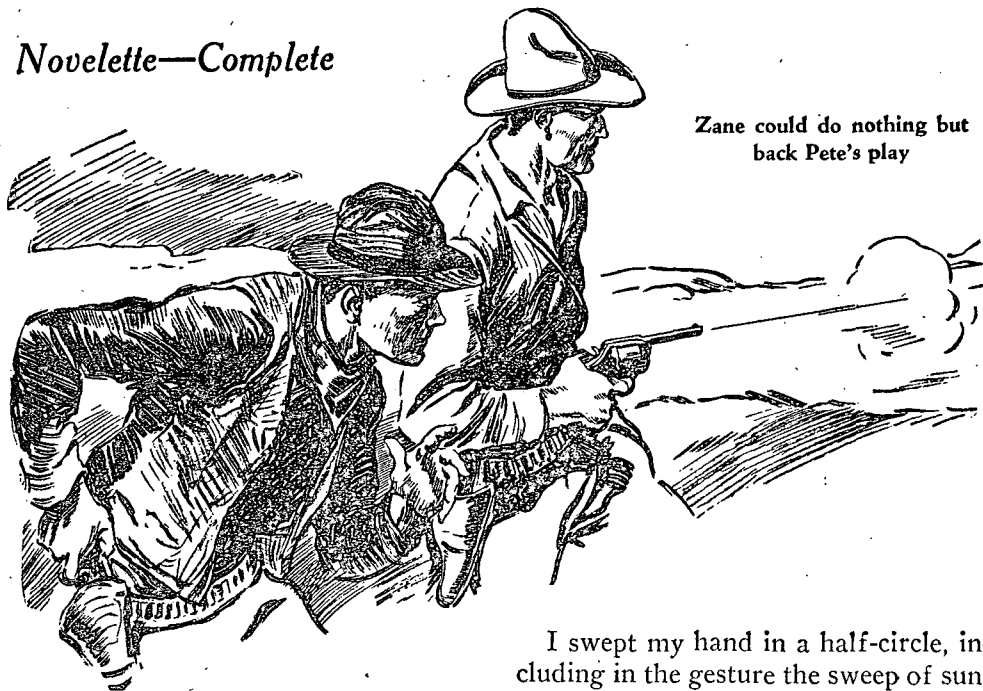
Carved in Sand

By ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

Author of "Law of the Rope," "The Watchful Eyes of Taiping," etc.

Bob Zane was certain that somewhere the desert held the evidence—carved in sand—to bring a murderer to justice

Novelette—Complete



Zane could do nothing but
back Pete's play

CHAPTER I.

TENDERFOOT CONTRAPTION.

WHEN a man lives a great deal in the open, little things sometimes stick in his mind. That was the way with the remark the college professor made to me.

"Everything in nature," he said, "has two points of manifestation."

"Meaning positive and negative?" I asked him, just to let him know that he wasn't going to spring any theory on me that I couldn't, at least, talk about.

"Not exactly that," he said. "It's something a little more subtle."

I swept my hand in a half-circle, including in the gesture the sweep of sun-glittering sand and cacti-studded desert. "What would be the double manifestation of that?" I asked him.

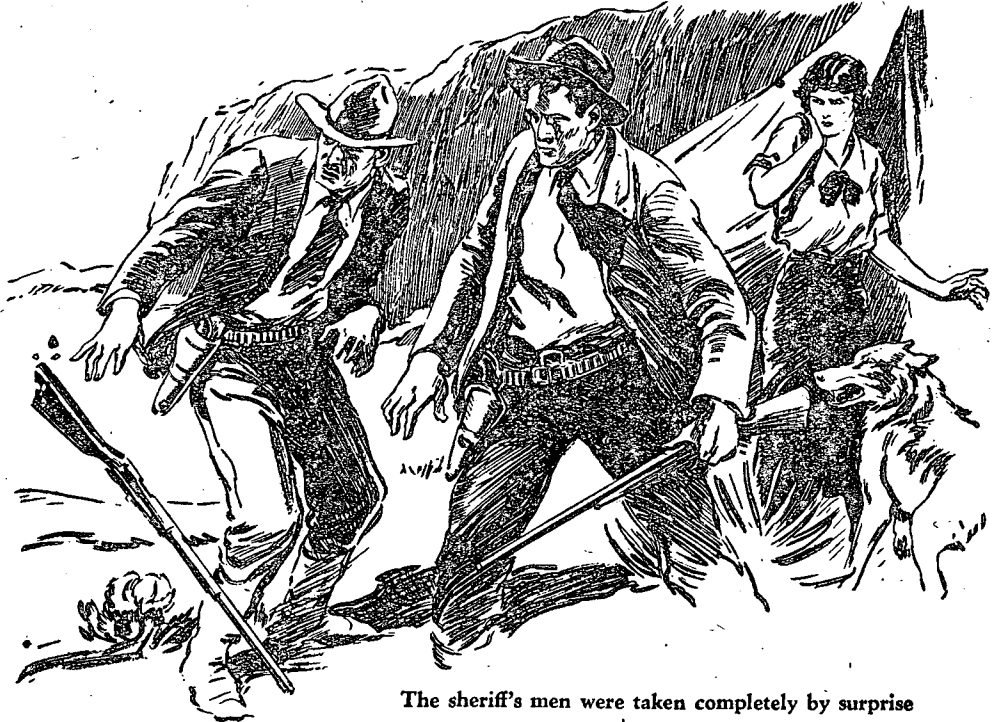
"I don't know," he said. "I'm not enough of a desert man to know its manifestations. But you know it. If you'll only watch it, you'll find that it does have a dual manifestation."

It was only a little thing perhaps, but somehow it stuck in my mind; and it seemed that I'd found the answer in Pete Ayers. Pete was desert born and desert bred, and the shifting sands had got into his blood. He was as restless as a swirl of loose sand in the embrace of a desert wind. Of course the desert leaves its mark on everybody who lives

in it. Most of the men who have lived in the desert have gray eyes, firm lips, a slow, deliberate way of moving about that is deceptive to a man who doesn't know the breed. When occasion requires they are as fast as greased light-

his shirt on the outcome of whatever he happened to be doing.

"Wait a minute, Pete," I said as he cocked the rifle. "Let's make certain that it's a coyote. He's acting sort of funny for a coyote."



The sheriff's men were taken completely by surprise

ning, and as deadly as a cornered lion. Ayers was different. He was just a happy-go-lucky kid who was forever rolling into mischief and stumbling out. He was always in trouble, always getting out of it by some fluke.

Now he lay stretched out beside me on the edge of the rim rock, the hot desert sun beating down on our backs. He handed me the binoculars.

"Brother," he said, "watch where the bullet strikes. I'm betting even money that I don't miss him by more than two inches, and I'll bet on a direct hit for reasonable odds."

That was the way with Pete; always making a bet, always willing to wager

"He's going to act a lot funnier," said Pete as he nestled his cheek against the stock of the rifle, "in just about one minute."

I focused the binoculars on the slope across the long dry cañon. Ordinarily I don't go in much for binoculars in the desert, because a desert man cannot afford to be cluttered up with a lot of weight. The tenderfoot always carries a camera, binoculars, hunting knife, and compass. They're things that are all right in their way, but the real desert man starts out with a six-gun, a canteen, a pocket knife, a box of matches and a sack of tobacco. That's about all he needs.

The binoculars were good ones that Pete had won from a tenderfoot in a poker game the night before. They brought up the opposite slope of the cañon with a clearness that made the black shadows transparent.

"HOLD everything, Pete!" I said. "It's a police dog!"

I heard Pete's grunt of incredulity, but he lowered the rifle and turned startled blue eyes to me.

"Hell," he said, "you're crazy! There aren't any police dogs out here. Them's tenderfoot binoculars and there's mebbe a sort of tenderfoot influence about 'em."

"Take a look yourself," I said.

Pete put down the rifle and reached for the binoculars. He focused them to his eyes, and then gave a low whistle.

"Hell!" he said. "And I'll bet I'd have hit him!"

I said nothing. We watched the animal for several seconds.

"What the hell's he doing here?" asked Pete.

I didn't know any more than he did—not as much, in fact, so I couldn't say anything. We lay there in silence, with the desert sun beating down on the glittering expanse of waste, making the black rim rock on the other side of the cañon twist and writhe in the heat waves.

After a while Pete passed the binoculars across to me. I found the dog again, steadied my elbows on the hot rock, and watched closely.

"He's running around in little circles, looking for a scent of some kind," I said. "Now it looks as though he's found it. He runs along straight for ten or fifteen yards, then stops and circles, and then starts going straight. Now, he's found what he wants. He's

running close to the ground—and making time."

"Hell," said Pete drily, "you don't need to tell me everything he's doin', I got eyes, even if they don't magnify eight diameters."

THE police dog fascinated me. I couldn't understand what he was doing out here in the desert. I kept the binoculars on him and watched him as he angled down the slope. He was running rapidly now, wagging his tail as he ran, and apparently following the scent without difficulty. He ran down around the edge of the slope, rounded an outcropping of rock, crossed the cañon, and vanished behind a ledge of the rim rock on our side of the cañon.

"Well," said Pete, "the show's over."

"No," I told him, "I'm going to find out what that dog's doing out here."

"That's just the way with you," he said. "Filled full of curiosity."

But I could see from the light in his blue eyes that he was curious, and that he also favored giving the dog a break. A police dog can't live long in the desert. A coyote can get by nicely, but not a dog, no matter how big or how strong he is. It's a question of generations of training, and the coyote has something that no dog has; a certain toughness that enables him to get by.

We moved along the rim rock. I was holding the binoculars by the strap when we reached the next little peak from which we could look down in the cañon.

Pete's exclamation at my elbow showed me that he had seen the camp. I raised the binoculars, and through them saw an automobile, rather battered and dilapidated; a white tent; a canteen; a cot; a box of provisions.

Then I saw a woman's bare arm reach out around the edge of the tent and pick something from the box.

"Looks like a woman down there," I said.

"What the devil would anybody want to camp in that cañon for?" asked Pete.

"Prospector maybe," I told him.

"A woman prospector?" he asked.

"Maybe. She had a white arm. Looked like she was city-bred.

"Just the arm showed?" asked Pete.

"That was all," I said.

"All right," he said. "Keep the binoculars then."

Suddenly the woman came out from around the edge of the tent. I could see at once that she was city-bred. The cut of her clothes, the delicacy of her complexion, the angry red sunburn on the backs of her forearms, all told the story. But the thing that interested me and held me breathlessly watching was the expression on her face. It was an expression of sheer terror.

The police had evidently been out with her and had lost her. He had been smelling along the dry sand of the desert, trying to pick up her trail; and now he was trotting along at her side, wagging his tail. Yet the woman's face was twisted and distorted with terror.

She was carrying something in her hand, and she ran twenty or thirty yards back up the slope to the roots of a sage brush and started digging with her left hand. Her right hand pushed something into the little hole, and then she patted the sand over it, got to her feet, and walked back toward the camp.

I HANDED the binoculars to Pete, and as my eyes focused on the camp I saw two dots moving from around the slope of the cañon. I saw the police dog grow rigid, and after a

few seconds I could hear the sound of his bark.

"Hell," said Pete, "she looks scared.

"She is," I said. "Look at the two dots coming around the slope there, about half a mile down the cañon, Pete."

He raised the glasses and grunted as his eyes took in the two dots. "Two men," he said, "with rifles and six-guns. They've got cartridges in the belts of the six-guns, and they look as though they were getting ready to shoot."

"Are they coming toward the camp?" I asked.

"Toward the camp," he said. "Hell, Bob, after this I think I'm going to carry these tenderfoot contraptions all the time.—In the meantime, I'm going down and cut in on that deal."

"Count me in," I told him.

He snapped the binoculars back into the case.

"Going back to get the burros?" I asked him.

"They'll wait," he told me. "Let's go."

The rim rock was a good ten feet in a straight drop. Then there was some loose sand, and the sheer slope of the side of the cañon.

Pete went over the rim rock without hesitation, lit in the sand, threw up a flurry of dust, made two jumps, and started sliding down the ridge. I didn't make quite so clean a leap, and I felt the impact as I struck the sand. My feet went out from under me, I rolled over a couple of times, got to my feet, and started sprinting down the slope, digging my heels into the soil, grabbing at the little clumps of sagebrush and taking long jumps to avoid the patches of rock.

Pete kept gaining on me. I don't know why he didn't go down head over

heels, but he managed to bound down as lightly as a mountain goat.

CHAPTER II.

MANNERS IN THE DESERT.

APPARENTLY the girl didn't see or hear us. She was looking at two men who were approaching.

The police dog heard us, however, and whirled, starting to bark. With that the woman turned and saw us, of course. She called the dog back and stood staring at us, and once more I caught the expression of terror on her face.

Pete's bronze hand went to his sombrero, swept it off in a bow, and he said, "Pardon me, ma'am, we just dropped in."

There was a ghost of a smile on her face, but it still held that expression of terror.

"It was almost a drop," she said, looking back up the slope where the dust clouds were still drifting about in the hot sun. "Who are you and what do you want?"

Pete jerked his head toward the direction of the approaching figures. "Just thought," he said, "that we'd see if you needed any assistance."

I saw her mouth tighten. "No," she said, "you can't be of any assistance to me."

I didn't beat about the bush at all. "Do you know the men who are coming?" I asked.

"I think so," she said.

"What do they want?" I asked.

"Me," she said.

I waited for an explanation, but there wasn't any. The dog was growling in his throat, but he was lying on the ground where she had ordered him

to stay, his yellow eyes glinting from us to the men who were coming up the dry wash.

The two men came up with the tense, watchful attitude of men who are expecting to engage in gun play at almost any minute. They looked us over and they looked the girl over. One of them stepped off to one side and said to the girl, "You're Margaret Blake?"

She nodded her head.

"You know who we are and why we are here?" he said.

She said nothing.

He looked from her over to us. "Who are these men?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said.

The man shifted his attention to Pete. "What's your connection with this?" he asked.

Pete grinned at him, a cold, frosty grin. "Don't you know whom I am?" he asked.

"No," said the other man, his eyes narrowing, "who are you?"

"I'm the guy," said Pete, "who is going to see that the young woman here gets a square deal."

"This woman," said the man, "is under arrest."

"Arrest for what?" asked Pete.

"As an accessory," said the man.

"To what?"

"Murder."

Pete laughed. "She don't look like she'd be good at murder," he said.

"You can't always tell by looks," said one of the men. "Now, you two fellows get started out of here. I don't like the way you horned in on this party."

"Don't you, now?" said Pete.

The other man said in a low voice, "Make them give up their guns, Charlie. We can't let them go out in the desert with their guns. They might ambush us."

"Yes," said Charlie. "You fellows will have to leave your guns here."

"Now I'll tell one," I told him.

I SAW grinning devils appear at the corners of Pete's mouth, caught the glint of his blue eyes as he reached slowly to his gun, pulled it out of the holster and looked at it almost meditatively.

"You don't want me to give *this* gun up?" he asked.

"That's what we want," said Charlie.

"This gun," said Pete, "is a funny gun. It goes off accidentally, every once in awhile."

"Pete!" I cautioned him.

The warning came too late. There was a spurt of flame from Pete's gun. I heard the impact of the heavy bullet as it struck the stock of the rifle in the hands of the man nearest Pete.

There was nothing to do but back his play, and so I made what speed I could snaking my six-gun from its holster.

The two men were taken completely by surprise. They had thought that their rifles were sufficient to command the situation. As a matter of fact, at close quarters a rifle is very likely to prove a cumbersome weapon, particularly when a man tries to take in too much territory with it.

"Drop it!" I told the man.

His eyes looked into the barrel of my Colt, and there was a minute when I didn't know exactly what was going to happen. Then the gun thudded to the sand. The bullet had jerked the other's gun from his grasp.

"All right, Bob," said Pete, "they'll get their hands in the air, and you can unbuckle the belts and let their six-guns slip off."

"First, let's make sure they've got their hands in the air," I told him.

Two pairs of hands came up slowly.

"You boys are making the mistake of your lives," said Charlie. "You're going to find yourselves in the pen for this."

"Please don't," the girl pled with us. "I'll go with them. It's inevitable."

"No," said Pete, "I don't like their manners—and I always play my hunches."

I unbuckled the guns, let them drop to the ground.

"We're officers," Charlie started to explain, "and you—"

"Sure," said Pete. "I knew you were officers as soon as I saw you. You've got that look about you—and your manners are so rotten. Now turn around and start walking back the way you came. I suppose you've got an automobile staked out around the edge of the slope, haven't you?"

They didn't say anything.

Pete shook his head. "Rotten manners," he said. "You don't answer courteous questions."

"Please!" said the girl. "Don't do this for me. He's right in what he says. You're going to get into serious trouble."

"Miss," said Pete, "getting into serious trouble is something that I'm accustomed to. I get into a new kind of trouble every day. Come on you two, let's march."

WE turned them around, but it took a prod with the muzzle of my six-gun to get Charlie started. After they had started they moved along doggedly and steadily.

We rounded the slope and found their car parked in a little draw. Pete's gun pointed the road to town.

"I'm going to be standing here," he said, "until that car is just a little black spot in the middle of a dust cloud,

'way over on the desert there. And if you should hesitate or turn around and start back, something tells me that you'll have tire trouble right away."

The men didn't say a word. They climbed into the automobile. The starting motor whirled, the engine responded, and the car crept along the sandy wash, struck the harder road, and rattled into speed. Pete and I stood there until the machine had vanished in the distance, leaving behind it nothing but a wisp of dust.

Pete looked at me and grinned. "Sore, Bob?" he asked.

"No," I told him. "I had to back your play, but I wish you'd use a little discretion sometimes."

"Discretion, hell!" he said. "There's no fun in discretion. Let's go back and talk with the woman. You can figure it out for yourself, Bob. She's okay. Those men were on the wrong track, that's all."

I wasn't so certain, but I holstered my weapon. We started trudging back through the sand. When we rounded the edge of the slope and could look up the cañon, I could see dust settling in the afternoon sunlight.

"Two dust clouds," I told him grimly.

Sure enough, the camp was still there; but the automobile, the young woman, and the police dog had gone.

Pete looked at me, and his face was ludicrous in its crestfallen surprise. "Hell!" he said.

"It's going to take them about two hours to get to town," I said. "Then they'll get some more guns, a couple of others to help them, and start back. The next question is, where can we be in two hours?"

Pete's eyes started to twinkle once more. "I know a swell bunch of country where's there's an old cabin," he

said, "and I don't think the burros would leave much of a trail getting up there."

"How far can we be on that trail in two hours?" I wanted to know.

"We can be pretty near there."

"Okay," I told him. "Let's go."

We climbed back up to the burros, got the string lined up, and started plodding up the slope toward the old cabin that Pete knew about.

AFTER about an hour the country changed, and we began to run into stunted cedar, glimpsing pines up on the high slopes of the mountain country beyond. Another half-hour, and we were well up in the mountains, from where we could look back over the desert.

I paused and pointed back toward the place where I knew the little desert town was situated. "Pete," I said, "you've got those binoculars. Take a look and see if you can see anything that looks like pursuit."

He was focusing the binoculars on the road when I heard a peculiar throbbing sound which grew in volume. I raised my eyes and picked out a little speck against the blue sky—a speck that might have been a buzzard, except that it was moving forward across the sky with steady purpose.

I tapped Pete on the shoulder and pointed with my finger. He raised the binoculars, looked for a minute, and then twisted his face into a grimace.

"They'll pick her up with that," I said, "before she's gone thirty miles."

"There's lots of places she could go inside of thirty miles," Pete said.

"Not with that automobile," I told him, "and not in this country."

Pete shrugged his shoulders. "How the hell did we know they were going to get an airplane to chase her with?"

"How the hell did I know that you were going to start gun play?" I told him, with some irritation in my voice.

"You should have been able to tell that," said Pete, "by looking at the woman. She was too pretty."

I sighed. "Well," I told him, "I always wanted to know what it felt like to be a fugitive from justice."

"Hell!" said Pete from the depths of his experience. "There ain't no novelty to it—not after the first time or two. It feels just like anything else."

I didn't say anything more. I merely watched the airplane as it diminished in the distance. I was still looking at it when I saw two other planes coming from the west. The plane I had seen first tilted from side to side, making signalling motions, and the other two planes swung in behind it. I focused the binoculars on them and saw them fly in formation, until suddenly they started down toward the desert.

The sun was just setting. The valley was filled with deep purple shadows. In the high places was the hush of coming twilight.

"What did you see?" asked Pete.

"Two more planes," I told him, snapping the binoculars into the leather case.

Pete grinned at me. "That," he said, "isn't going to keep us from eating, is it?"

"Not this meal," I told him, "but I don't know about the next."

CHAPTER III.

ACCESSORIES TO THE CRIME.

PETE had his blankets spread out on the other side of a little ridge.

I was careful not to disturb him as I got up and sat there in the moonlight, looking down on the dark mys-

tery of the shadow-filled valleys below. It was cold up here, but I had a blanket wrapped around me, Indian fashion.

Down below, as far as the eye could reach, stretched the desert; a great waste of level spaces, broken by jagged mountain spurs—mountains that were still a part of the desert, dry, arid, covered with juniper, stunted cedar, and an occasional pine. There were no tumbling streams, no dense underbrush—just barren rock and dry trees that rustled in the wind which was blowing from the desert.

Looking down into the black splotches of darkness in the valleys, I knew what was going on in the desert. The wind was stirring the sand into soft whispers, typifying the restlessness of the desert. For the desert is ever restless, ever changing. Its moods change as frequently as the appearance of the desert mountains is changed by sunlight and shadow.

Even up here in this cold, high place the desert seemed to be whispering its mysterious messages; the noise made by drifting sand as it scours against the soft desert rocks, carving them into weird structures, polishing, cutting, drifting, changing, ever changing.

I sat there for three or four hours, watching the moon climb over the eastern rim of the mountains, watching the black pools of mysterious shadow in the cañons gradually recede until the golden surface of the desert glinted up at me from below. Several times I listened to hear Pete's snores, but no sound came from his direction.

After awhile I felt somewhat relaxed, and rolled back into my blankets, where it was warmer. In fifteen or twenty minutes I began to feel drowsy, and drifted off to sleep. After all, as Pete had remarked, being a fugitive from justice, didn't feel particularly

unique, once one had become accustomed to it.

I WOKE early in the morning and watched the east taking on a brassy hue. It was still and cold. There was not a sound, not a breath. The stars, which had blazed steadily during the night, had now receded to mere needle points of light; and soon they became invisible.

I kicked back the blankets, put on my boots and leather jacket, stamped my feet to get the circulation in them, and walked around the little ledge, to the place where Pete had spread his blankets. The blankets were there, but Pete wasn't.

I looked over the ground, and felt of the blankets. There was frost on the inside of them, where they had been turned back when Pete slipped out. I studied the tracks as well as I could, and then I knew that Pete had slipped one over on me. He had pulled out long before I had got up to watch the moonlight.

Fifty yards from camp I found a piece of paper stuck on a bush. When he had to be, Pete was glib with his tongue, and glib with a pencil if he couldn't talk. He was one of those fellows who expressed himself well.

I unfolded the note and read:

Dear Bob:

I got you into this, and there's no reason why I shouldn't take the blame. You didn't do anything except follow my lead. I don't know how serious it is, but I'm going to find out. You sit tight until I come back.

(Signed)

Pete.

I should have known that Pete would have done something like that, and I felt irritated that I hadn't guessed it in advance and guarded against it.

It was all right for Pete to claim that

I had been blameless and that he was going to take the responsibility. I probably wouldn't have started things if Pete hadn't been there—and then again I might have. But I didn't need a nurse or a guardian, and when I pulled a gun on an officer it was my own free and voluntary act. I didn't like the way Pete was trying to shield me, as though I were a child, instead of a man ten years his senior.

I got some fire wood together, got the coffee to boiling, and sat crouched by the fire, warming my hands and waiting for a while before I drank the coffee, hoping that Pete would show up. When he didn't show up, I drank a couple of cups of coffee, but kept the pot hot so that he could have some when he came in.

The sun climbed slowly up the blue-black of the desert sky, and there was still no sign of Pete. I went out on a projecting rock where I could look down into the valley, and kept watch on what was going on. Toward ten o'clock I heard the sound of automobiles, and I could make them out through the glasses, two carloads of men jolting their way along the floor of the valley.

AN hour later, I heard them coming back; and the glasses showed me that which I had dreaded to see, yet expected. In the rear seat of the first automobile was a man and a woman. At that distance I couldn't make out their features, but I didn't have much doubt who they were.

I waited until the machines had gone the length of the valley and turned through the pass into the level desert, then I threw packs on the burros and started back down the mountain. Pete knew exactly where I had been camped, and he also knew that I had the

binoculars. I figured that he probably would have a chance to use his pencil once more.

I hit the trail of the automobiles and started following along, keeping my eyes pretty much on the ground. Within half a mile I found what I was looking for, a folded piece of paper lying by the side of the road, catching the glint of the hot desert sun. I unfolded the paper. It was a note from Pete, all right. He hadn't put any heading on it at all, so that if the officers discovered it, it wouldn't give them any clew which would lead to me. The note read simply:

They caught me. I put up a fight, but they got me, and I guess they got me dead to rights. The woman is the daughter of Sam Blake. Blake killed a prospector named Skinner who had a cabin over in Sidewinder Cañon. They jailed him, and the woman helped him escape. They caught him again and are holding her as an accessory. I don't know what they're going to put against me. I told them you didn't know anything about it and had backed my play with an empty gun. I don't think they're going to look for you.

I knew Bob Skinner, and I also knew the place over in Sidewinder Cañon. It was fifteen or twenty miles over the mountains.

There was nothing much to be done except trail along behind the automobiles, so I plugged along doggedly through the desert sunshine. All the time, I kept thinking about the stuff the woman had buried at the foot of the sagebrush when she saw the two men coming from the direction of the road. When I got near that first camp of hers, I made a detour and went into it. The officers had been all through it, probably looking for evidence.

I climbed back into the shade cast by a spur of rock, and got out the tenderfoot's binoculars again. When I was

sure that I had the desert all to myself, I went over to the clump of sagebrush and dug in the sand.

I found a package done up in a newspaper. The package had hacksaw blades and a gun. The hacksaw blades had been used, and I figured that was how Sam Blake had managed to slip out of jail. As far as I could tell, the gun hadn't been fired.

It was a .45 single action Colt, and it had been carried around quite a bit in a holster.

I looked at the newspaper. It was an extra edition, hurriedly thrown together; one of those little hand-printed efforts put out in small desert towns, usually once a week or once every two weeks.

Ordinarily they contained nothing more exciting than a chronicle of the comings and goings of people who live in a small community.

But this paper was different. Across the top, in big blotchy headlines, black type announced:

BLAKE BREAKS JAIL

Down below:

OFFICERS SUSPECT WOMAN ACCOMPLICE

I SAT down on my heels in the sand, and read everything that the paper contained. It was an account of the jail break, which didn't interest me particularly, and an account of the crime, which interested me more.

Sam Blake charged that Bob Skinner had jumped a claim which Blake had staked, stripping the claim of the valuable gold that was in a pocket and then skipping out.

I knew Skinner. He was the sort of customer who would be likely to do that very thing. Blake asserted that Skinner had picked up more than five

thousand dollars in gold from the pocket, and so Blake had taken his gun and gone down into Sidewinder Cañon.

A lunger by the name of Ernest Peterman had seen him going down toward Skinner's cabin. Peterman had a little cabin up on the summit of a ridge on the east side of Sidewinder Cañon. He'd seen Blake coming along the trail which led to the cañon, and had recognized him. He'd watched him go down to Skinner's cabin. It had been about two-thirty in the afternoon, and Peterman said he knew that Skinner was alive at the time because there was a lot of smoke coming out of the chimney of Skinner's shack. He hadn't paid any particular attention to it, however; he'd just given the scene a casual glance and then gone out to take his afternoon sun bath.

It happened that a ranger had dropped in to see Skinner some time the next day. He'd found Skinner dead, with a bullet hole in his forehead and a knife wound in his heart. He'd found horse tracks in the trail, and had been able to mark them because of a broken shoe on the right hind foot. He'd trailed the horse into the little settlement, had found it, identified it as belonging to Blake, and had finally forced Blake to admit that he'd been to the cabin.

At first Blake denied it. Later on, he admitted that he'd gone down to have a settlement with Skinner, but he claimed that Skinner was dead when he got there. Things looked black for him because he hadn't reported the murder, and because at first he'd denied that he'd gone down to see Skinner at all. But the thing that clinched the case against him was the testimony of the lunger. If smoke had been coming out of the chimney at the time Blake hit

the shack, it was a cinch Skinner had been alive then. Nobody doubted the good faith of the lunger.

I read the paper and frowned. I could see that Pete Ayers had acted on impulse, and the impulse had led him into trouble. We were going to be hooked as accessories, along with the girl. The authorities didn't like the idea of Blake sawing the bars of the jail window and slipping out into the night.

I led the burros over to a nearby spring, saw that they had water, and then started on the long journey over the mountains to Sidewinder Cañon. I didn't dare to strike the main trails. On the other hand, with burros I could keep moving over the desert mountains, particularly after the moon came up.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DESERT WHISPERS.

IT was well past daylight when I came out of the jagged mountain formation on the west and into Sidewinder Cañon. I could look down the twisting cañon and see the roof of the prospector's shack. I staked out the burros, and went down on foot.

I could see where the officers and the curious ones had been tramping around the shack. It sat out on a little sandy plateau, and there had been a desert wind in the night which had wiped out most of the tracks; yet they showed as confused indentations in the sand.

It looked as though at least ten or a dozen people had milled around the shack, tracking down the ground.

I went into the cabin. The door was open, of course, as is customary in mountain or desert cabins. There was the damp, musty smell of places which

are shaded from the purifying effect of direct sunlight. There was also another musty smell which was more ominous and unforgettable; the smell of death.

I found the bed where Skinner had been sleeping. I found red stains, dry and crusted, on the blankets; stains also on the floor. Lazy flies buzzed in circles over the red stains. It was not a pleasant place to be.

I made but a casual inspection. I knew that others had been there before, and that every inch of the cabin had been searched. Doubtless some of the searchers had been desert men.

I walked out into the sunlight and took a great breath of fresh air, looking up into the clear blue of the cloudless sky, then over at the glittering expanse of jagged, barren ranges which hemmed in the cañon. Everything was still and silent.

Far up in the heavens a black dot marked a circling buzzard.

I started to look around.

IT was ten minutes later that I saw something I couldn't explain. That was a fresh break in the little corral back of the house. It was a crazy structure of weatherbeaten lumber, held together by rusted nails and supported by posts set into the soft sand at various angles. It was the place where Bob Skinner had kept his prospecting burros; and I could see that a horse had been in the corral recently, and it looked to me as though the break in the corral had been done recently. In one place a board had been splintered, and the splinters hadn't as yet become dulled by the desert sunlight. The clean board showed out from beneath its weatherbeaten veneer.

I looked over the stretch of sand around the corral. Useless to look for

tracks there. The wind had leveled the sand out and made it into miniature drifts. It was right in line with the opening of a little cañon, down which the night wind would sweep with concentrated force.

I rolled a cigarette and sat looking at that break in the corral fence. After awhile I started up the cañon. By the time I had gone a hundred yards I came to a little sheltered place, where there was some soft sand that hadn't been blown by the wind. I saw the tracks of a horse, and to one side the print of a booted foot.

The sun was climbing higher now, and the walls of the little cañon began to radiate heat. I plugged my way along over the rocks, searching for the faintest sign of tracks. A little later on I found more tracks. Then I struck a little trail that ran along the side of the cañon, and in this trail it was easy to follow the tracks. They were the tracks of a horse, and behind the horse, the tracks of a man.

I worked along the little dry cañon, and struck a level place. The horse was running here, and the tracks of the man were heavy on the toes and lighter on the heels.

After awhile I got into country that didn't have much sand, but I could follow the tracks better because there hadn't been anything to drift with the desert night wind. I saw the tracks of the horse climb up a ridge, and I followed them.

Near the top of the ridge I struck horse tracks again, and farther on I struck horse tracks and no man tracks. I followed the horse tracks off and on for three or four hundred yards, looking for man tracks. There weren't any.

I went back and tried to pick up the man tracks. I couldn't find them again.

They had gone to the top of the ridge and then vanished.

I sat down on my heels, rolled another cigarette, and thought for awhile.

THERE was a spring down the ridge, and three or four miles over toward the head of Side-winder Cañon. It wasn't a particularly good spring—just a trickle of brackish water, thick with alkali—but it was a spring just the same. I started working down toward that spring.

I didn't see any man tracks until I was within fifty yards of the spring; then I picked up the tracks of booted feet again. As nearly as I could tell, they were the same tracks that I had seen following along behind the horse tracks.

I searched around the spring, and found horse tracks. These didn't look like the same horse tracks that I had seen earlier in the day. They were the tracks of a bigger horse, and they seemed to be fresher. I went over to the trail which led into the spring, and I could see where the horse had come in along this trail and gone out along it.

I kept poking along, looking in the sagebrush, and finally I found a hole dug in the side of the mountain. It was about a foot deep by two feet long. I poked around in the hole. It wasn't a hole that had been dug with a shovel, but something that had been scooped in the side of the mountain, and half-filled in with slag from the side of the bank above. There wasn't anything in the hole.

I went down and followed the tracks of the horse. They went down the trail, evenly spaced and at regular intervals.

I turned back from that trail and went back up the ridges the way I had come into the spring. It was hot now,

and the sun was beating down with steady, eye-dazzling fury.

I managed to get back up to the last place where I had found the horse tracks, and started tracking the horse. That was comparatively easy. The horse had worked over toward the west and north, following down a ridge which wasn't quite so rocky, and on which there was a more dusty soil to hold the tracks.

I knew that my burros were trained in the ways of the desert and could shift for themselves until I got back; but I was in need of food, and the inside of my mouth felt raw from drinking the alkali water at the little spring. Nevertheless I kept pushing on, working against time, and at length I found where the horse had started wandering back and forth from a direct line, as though looking for something to graze on.

I followed the tracks until it got dark, and then I built a little fire and huddled over it, keeping warm until the moon came up. Then I began my tracking once more. It was slow work, but I took no chances of getting off the trail. I just worked slowly along the trail, following it along the sides of the ridges; and finally I came to something black lying on the ground.

I saw that it was a saddle, and feeling the tie in the latigo, I could tell that the saddle had been bucked off. The horn was smashed, and there were places where the iron hoofs had cut the leather of the saddle. The horse had evidently bucked and twisted, and had walked out from under the saddle. The blankets were off to one side. Rocks were pushed loose from the indentations in the earth which had held them, as though the horse had been standing on his head and striking out with all four feet.

I marked the place where the saddle was, and kept on working down the slope.

IT was still dark when I heard a horse whinny.

I called to him. Then I heard his shod feet ringing on the rocks as he came up to me. He was glad to see me. Right then, a man represented food and water to him, and he was eager for human companionship. There wasn't any rope around his neck, but I didn't need any. I twisted my fingers in his mane, and he followed along with me like a dog. When I came back to the place where the saddle lay, I got it back on him, and climbed into it.

He had lost his bridle, but I cut off the strings from the saddle, roped them together and made a rough hackamore.

The horse was weak, thirsty and tired; but he was glad to yield to human direction once more, and he carried me back over the ridges.

It was two hours past daylight when I came to the spring, where the horse drank greedily. I let him rest for half or three-quarters of an hour, and gave him a chance to browse on some of the greenery which grew around the edges of the water. Then I sent him down the trail and found my burros, standing with full stomachs and closed eyes, their long ears drooping forward.

I got a rope from my pack, slipped it around the neck of the horse, and started along the trail which led up the east slope of the mountains on the side of the cañon. When I got to the top I poked around, looking for a camp, and after a while I saw the glint of the sun on something white. A man rolled over in the sunlight, pulled a blanket around his nude figure, and got to his feet. He stood grinning at me sheepishly.

I rode over to him. "You're Ernest Peterman?" I asked.

He nodded. He was getting back his health there in the high places of the desert, I knew. That much could be seen in the bronzed skin, the clear eye, and the poise of his head.

Man has devised many different methods for combating various ills, but he has never yet devised anything which is superior to the healing hand of nature in the desert. Let a man get into the high places of the dry desert atmosphere, where the sun beats down from a cloudless sky; let him live a simple life, bathing in sunshine, and resting with the cold night air fresh in his nostrils, and there is nothing which is incurable.

I WANTED you to take a little ride with me," I told him.

"How far?" he asked.

"Just up to the top of the ridge."

"All right. In an hour or so?"

"No," I told him. "Now. I want to get there about a certain time in the afternoon."

"What time?" he asked.

"The same time that you saw Sam Blake go down into Sidewinder Cañon," I told him.

He shrugged his shoulders and shook his head, as though trying to shake loose some disagreeable memory.

"I didn't want to do it," he said.

"Do what?" I asked.

"Testify," he told me.

"I didn't say you did."

"I know," he said. "It isn't that. It's just the thoughts that have been worrying me lately. Have you seen his daughter?"

I nodded.

"A wonderful girl," he said. "I don't think her father could be a murderer."

"He went down there with a gun, didn't he?" I asked.

"Yes."

"You don't suppose he just went down there to pay a social call, do you?"

"I don't know. He'd been robbed. Everybody seems to think that Skinner really robbed him."

"Did you know Skinner at all well?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"Ever get up to the top of the ridge much?"

"I've been up there once or twice in the morning."

"How did you happen to be up there on that particular afternoon?"

"I don't know. I was restless, and I just started walking up there. It was a hot day. I took it easy."

"And the shadows were just beginning to form on the western rim of the mountains?" I asked.

He nodded.

"And you could look down on Skinner's little shack?"

He nodded again.

"All right," I said, "I'd like to have you take a ride up there with me."

I let him ride the horse, and he seemed to feel a lot easier when I had a rope around the horse's neck, leading him. I took it that Peterman was pretty much of a tenderfoot in the desert.

"How did you happen to come to the desert country?" I asked him.

"I've tried everything else."

"Are you afraid of it?"

"Yes," he said, "I was dreadfully afraid at first. And then I got so I wasn't afraid."

"How did that happen?" I wanted to know. "Usually when a man sees the desert he either loves it or he hates it. If he hates it his hatred is founded on fear."

"I know," he said. "I hated it at first, and I hated it because I was afraid of it. I'm willing to admit it."

"What changed you?"

"You'd laugh if I told you," he said.

I LOOKED at him, at the bronzed skin, the clear eye, the steady poise of the head, and I smiled. "Perhaps," I said, "I wouldn't laugh."

"It was the whispers," he said. "The whispers at night."

"You mean the sand whispers?" I asked.

He nodded. "There was something reassuring about them," he said. "At first they frightened me. It seemed as though voices were whispering at me; and then, gradually, I began to see that this was the desert, trying to talk; that it was whispering words of reassurance."

I nodded, and we didn't say anything more until we got to the summit of the ridge. I looked over the ridge, and checked Peterman as he started to look over.

"Not yet," I said. "Wait about fifteen minutes."

He sat and looked at me as though he thought I might be a little bit off in my upper story. But already the desert had begun to put its mark upon him; and so he didn't say anything, merely watched me as I smoked a cigarette.

When I had finished two cigarettes, I nodded my head.

"All right," I said. "Now look over."

He got up and looked over the top of the ridge. He looked around for a moment and said, "I don't see anything."

"Look down at Skinner's cabin."

He looked down, and all of a sudden I heard him give an exclamation, his eyes widening in surprise.

I unstrapped the binoculars and handed them to him. "All right," I said, "take another look."

CHAPTER V.

MAKE WAY FOR A WITNESS.

SUN beat down upon the little desert town with its dusty main street and its unpainted board structures squatting in the gray desert which lined either side of the road. A big pile of tin cans marked the two ends of the main street, and these piled up tin cans were bordered by a nondescript collection of junk which spread out over the desert, interspersed with clumps of sagebrush.

There were occasional automobiles on the street; automobiles, for the most part, of an ancient vintage, innocent of finish and as weatherbeaten and dust-covered as the board structures themselves. There were also horses tied to the hitching rack in front of the general merchandise store, and a couple of sleepy burros rested on three legs at a time, casting black shadows on a dusty street.

We rode toward the building where the preliminary hearing was being held. A crowd of people were jammed into the little structure, despite the intense sunlight which beat down upon the roof. Other people crowded around the outside of the building, blocking the windows, craning their necks to listen. Out in the street little groups, recognizing the futility of trying to hear what was going on inside, formed gabbing centers of gossip to discuss the case.

I climbed from the saddle burro and dropped the rope reins over his head. "Make way for a witness," I said.

Men looked around at men. "Hell!

It's Bob Zane," someone said. "Make way, you fellows, here comes Bob Zane."

I pushed my way into the courtroom. The tenderfoot clung to my blue shirt. He was sort of frightened and subdued. The atmosphere of the place reeked with the odor of packed bodies and many breaths. People stared at us with cold, curious eyes.

Abruptly, the little space around the judge's desk opened ahead of us, and the two officers stared with startled eyes into my face. One of them went for his gun.

"There he is now!" shouted Charlie, the deputy.

"Order in the courtroom!" yelled a wizened justice of the peace, whose white goatee quavered with indignation.

The officer pulled out the gun and swung it in my direction. "The man who was the accomplice of Pete Ayers, one of the defendants in this case," he shouted.

The judge banged on the desk. "Order in the court! Order in the court! Order in the court!" he screamed in a high piping voice.

I squared myself and planted my feet, conscious of the business end of the gun that was trained at my middle.

"JUST a minute," I said. "I came to surrender myself and demand an immediate hearing. I'm charged with being an accessory in a murder case. I can't be an accessory unless there's been a murder, and unless the person I aided is guilty. I've got a witness with me who wants to change his testimony."

I half turned, and pushed forward the tenderfoot.

Peterman looked about him, gulped and nodded.

"You can't interrupt proceedings this way!" piped the judge.

"Don't you want to hear the evidence?" I asked.

"Of course," he said, "but you aren't a witness."

I held up my right hand and moved a step forward, holding him with my eyes. "All right," I said, "swear me in."

He hesitated a moment, then his head nodded approvingly as his shrill, falsetto voice intoned the formal oath of a witness.

I moved abruptly toward the witness chair. One of the officers started toward me with handcuffs, but I turned to face the judge. I began to speak rapidly, without waiting to be questioned by anybody.

"The man who killed Bob Skinner," I said, "put a horse in Skinner's corral. When he had finished killing Skinner, there was blood on his hands, and when he tried to catch the horse, the horse smelled the blood, and lunged away from him. The man chased after the horse in a frenzy of haste, and the horse broke through the corral fence and started up the cañon, back of the house. The man followed along behind him, trying to catch the horse.

"A wind storm obliterated the tracks in the sand in front of the corral and around the house, so that the tracks couldn't have been seen unless the officers had appreciated the significance of that break in the corral fence and had gone on up the cañon looking for tracks. I took the course that a horse would naturally have taken, and I picked up the tracks again, up the cañon. And also, the tracks of the man who was following."

Having gone that far, I could see that I wasn't going to be interrupted. I looked out over the courtroom and

saw eyes that were trained upon me, sparkling with curiosity. I saw that the judge was leaning forward on the edge of his chair. The two officers had ceased their advance and were standing rooted to the spot.

Pete Ayers, who had stared at me with consternation when I pushed my way into the courtroom, was now grinning happily. Damn him! I don't suppose he ever knows what it is to worry over anything. He is as happy-go-lucky as a cloud of drifting sand in the desert. The girl was staring at me with a white face and bloodless lips. She didn't yet appreciate what my coming meant; but Pete knew me, and his face was twisted into that gleeful grin which characterizes him when he is getting out of a tight place.

"All right," snapped the judge in that high, piping voice of his, "go on. What did you find?"

"I FOLLOWED the horse tracks to the top of the ridge," I said,

"and I found where the man had quit chasing the horse. Then I followed the man tracks a way, and lost them. But I figured what a man would do who was out in the desert and hot from chasing a horse he couldn't catch. So I worked on down the ridge to a spring, and once more found the tracks, this time at the spring. I looked around and found where the man had dug a hole and had buried something near the spring. Then I found where he had walked out, secured another horse, ridden back to the spring, pulled whatever had been in the hole out of its place of concealment, and ridden away. He hadn't bothered to look after the horse that had been left in the mountains, figuring that it would die in the desert from lack of water and food.

"I then went back to the place where

I had left the horse tracks, and started following the horse. Eventually I found the saddle, and then I found the horse."

There was a commotion in the courtroom. The officers conferred together in whispers, and one of them started toward the door. I quit talking for a little while and watched the officer who was pushing his way through the swirling group of men.

Outside the building a horse whinnied, and the whinny sounded remarkably significant, upon the hot, still air and the sudden silence of that room—a silence broken only by the irregular breathing of men who are packed into the narrow quarters, and who must breathe through their mouths.

"Well?" rasped the judge. "Go on. What happened?"

"I found the saddle," I said, "and I found the horse. I brought the horse back and I brought the saddle back."

"What does all that prove?" asked the judge, curiously.

"It proves," I said, "that the murderer of Bob Skinner wasn't Sam Blake. It proves that Sam Blake came down to call for a show-down with Bob Skinner, but Skinner was dead when he got there. Somebody had murdered Skinner in order to take the gold from his cabin, and the horse had balked at the odor of blood. The murderer had chased the horse for a while, but he couldn't continue to chase him, because he was carrying enough gold to make it difficult for him to keep going after the horse. So he went down to the spring and cached the gold; then he went out to get another horse, and later came back after the gold."

The judge's glittering eyes swung as unerringly as those of a vulture spotting a dead rabbit to the bronzed face of Ernest Peterman, the tenderfoot.

"That man," he said, "swears that he saw smoke coming out of Bob Skinner's cabin just before Sam Blake went in there."

"He *thought* he saw smoke, your honor," I said. "He's a tenderfoot, and new to the desert. He didn't go up on the ridge very often, and he wasn't familiar with Bob Skinner's cabin. Particularly when the afternoon sunlight throws a black shadow from the western ridge."

"What's the shadow got to do with it?" asked the judge.

"It furnishes a black background for the tree that's growing just back of the house, right in line with the chimney on Skinner's cabin."

"A tree?" piped the judge. "What's a tree got to do with it?"

"The tree," I said slowly, "is a blue Palo Verde tree."

"What's a blue Palo Verde tree?" the judge inquired petulantly.

"One that you've seen many times, your honor," I said, "in certain sections of the desert. It only grows in a very few places in the desert. It requires a certain type of soil and a certain type of climate. It isn't referred to as a Palo Verde tree in these parts. You honor has probably heard it called a smoke tree."

II SAT back and let that shot crash home.

The blue Palo Verde grows in the desert. The Indians called it the smoke tree because it sends up long, lacy branches that are of a blueish-green; and when the sun is just right, seen against a black shadow, the smoke tree looks for all the world like a cloud of smoke rising up out of the desert.

Peterman was a tenderfoot, and he'd climbed up on the ridge just when the western shadows had furnished a black

background for the smoke tree behind Skinner's cabin. He had taken a look at the scene and decided that smoke was coming out of the chimney. No one had ever thought to have him go back and take a look at the cabin under similar circumstances. They had been so certain that Sam Blake was guilty of the murder that they hadn't bothered to check the evidence closely.

The judge was staring at me as though I had destroyed some pet hobby of his. "Do you mean to say that a man mistook a smoke tree for smoke coming from a chimney?" he asked.

I nodded. "Keener eyes than his have made the same mistake, your honor," I said, "which is the reason the Indians called the tree the smoke tree."

"Then who owned the horse?" asked the judge. "Who was it that went in there before Sam Blake called at the cabin?"

I pointed my finger dramatically at the place where the officers had been standing.

"I had hoped," I said, "that the guilty man would betray himself by his actions. I notice that one of the men has left the courtroom hurriedly."

As I spoke, there was the sound of a terrific commotion from outside. A shot was fired, a man screamed, a horse gave a shrill squeal of agony; then there was the sound of a heavy, thudding impact, and the stamping of many feet.

Men turned and started pushing toward the narrow exit which led from the place where the hearing was being conducted. They were men who were accustomed to the freedom of the outdoors. When they started to go through a door, they all started at once.

It was a struggling rush of bodies that pulled and jostled. Some men

made for the windows, some climbed on the shoulders and heads of others and fought their way over the struggling mass of humanity. Futilely, the judge pounded his gavel again and again. Margaret Blake screamed, and I saw Pete Ayers slip a circling arm around her shoulder and draw her close to him.

I thought it was a good time to explain to the judge.

"THAT horse I found, your honor," I said, pushing close to him so that I could make my voice heard above the bedlam of sound, "was a nervous bronco. He made up to me all right because he was thirsty and hungry, but he was a high strung, high spirited horse. I left him tied to the rack out in front. I thought perhaps the owner of the horse might try to climb on his back and escape, hoping to take that bit of four-legged evidence with him. But horses have long memories. The last time the horse had seen that man, he had smelled the odor of human blood and had gone crazy with fright."

The crowd thinned out of the courtroom. Here and there a man who had been pushed against a wall or trampled underfoot, cursed and ran, doubled over with pain, or limping upon a bad leg; but the courtroom had emptied with startling speed.

I crossed to the window as the judge laid down his gavel. Impelled by curiosity, he crowded to my side. Outside, we saw, the men were circling about a huddled figure on the sidewalk. The horse, his ears laid back, his nostrils showing red, his eyes rolled in his head until the whites were visible, was tugging and pulling against the rope that held him to the hitching rack. I noticed that there were red stains on

one fore hoof, and a bullet wound in his side.

Lying on the sidewalk, a rude affair of worn boards, was the crumpled body of the deputy who had helped to make the arrest of Margaret Blake that first time we had seen her. The whole top of his head seemed to have been beaten in by an iron hoof.

The judge looked and gasped. He started for the door, then caught himself with an appreciation of the dignity which he, as a magistrate, owed to himself. He walked gravely back to the raised desk which sat on the wooden platform, raised the gavel and banged it down hard on the desk.

"Court," he said, "is adjourned!"

IT wasn't until after Pete Ayers and Margaret Blake had started out in the desert on their honeymoon that I got to thinking of the words of the college professor.

The desert is a funny place. It's hard to know it long without thinking that there's something alive about it. You get to thinking those sand whispers are not just a hissing of dry sand particles against rock or sagebrush, but real whispers from the heart of the desert.

The desert shows itself in two ways. There's the grim cruelty which is really a kindness, because it trains men to rely upon themselves and never to make mistakes. Then there's the other side of the desert, the care-free dust clouds that drift here and there. They're as free as the air itself.

Pete Ayers was a part of the desert. The desert had branded him with

the brand of care-free sunlight and the scurrying dust cloud.

The desert had recorded the tell-tale tracks that had led to the discovery of the real murderer. Every man is entitled to his own thoughts. Mine are that it's all just two sides of the desert, the grim side that holds justice for murderers, and the happy side that leaves its stamp on men like Pete Ayers.

Pete Ayers clapped me on the back. His bride stared at me with starry eyes.

"We owe it all to you, Bob Zane!" she said, her lips quivering.

But I looked out at the desert. The white heat of an afternoon sun had started the horizons to dancing in the heat waves. Mirages glinted in the distance. A gust of wind whipped up a little desert dust-spout, and it scurried along, the sagebrush bending its head as the dust-spout danced over it.

"No," I told her, "you owe it to the desert. The desert is kind to those who love it. She held the evidence, carved in sand, for the righting of a wrong and the betrayal of a real culprit to justice."

Pete Ayers grinned at me and said, "You're getting so you talk just like that swivel-eyed college professor you guided around last month."

But his smiling eyes shifted over my shoulder and caught sight of the swirling dust cloud scampering merrily over the desert. I watched his expression soften as his eyes followed the swirling sand. And then I knew that college professor was right.

THE END.

Charles Alden Seltzer

Presents MICHAEL DOLAN, a splendid two-fisted Westerner you'll long remember, in a book-length novel starting next week:

CLEAR THE TRAIL

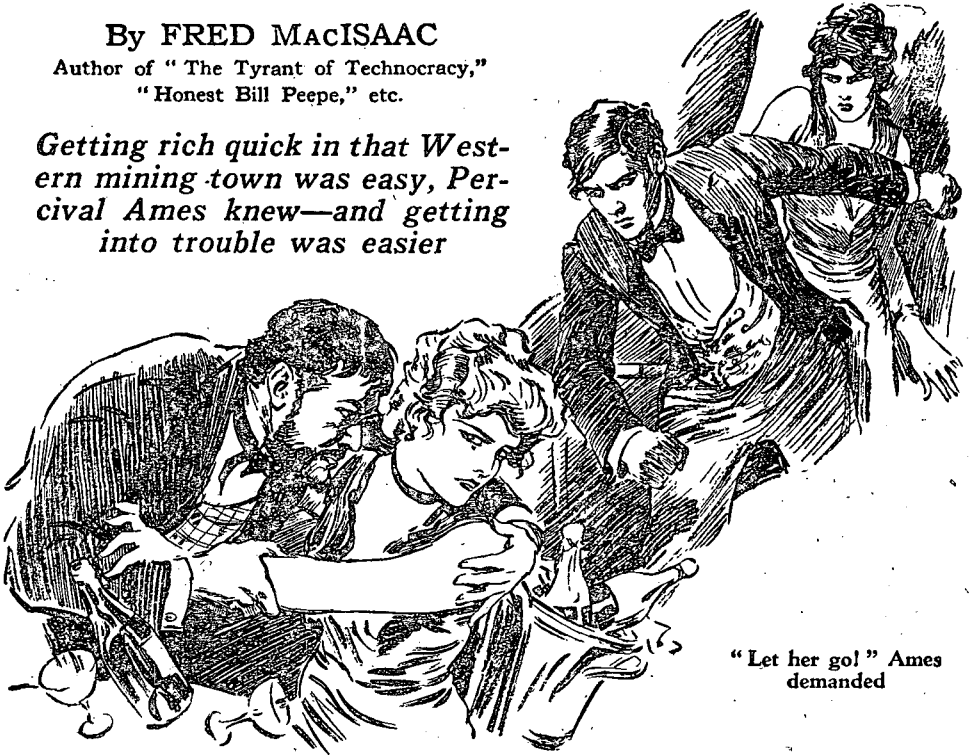
Burning Billions

By FRED MACISAAC

Author of "The Tyrant of Technocracy,"

"Honest Bill Peepe," etc.

Getting rich quick in that Western mining town was easy, Percival Ames knew—and getting into trouble was easier



"Let her go!" Ames demanded

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

IT was a thrilling battle of wealth and wealthy men that Percival Ames entered in the frontier mining town of Virginia City, Nevada, in 1873, although Ames's rôle was a minor one. Coming from one of Boston's best families, he took a job as bookkeeper in the Virginia City branch of the Bank of California.

One of the first persons Ames ran into, literally, was Steve Yates, gambler and expert pistol shot, who ran the gaming rooms on the second floor of the elaborate Halcyon saloon and dance hall. The two men had an argument but were separated by bystanders after Ames had knocked Yates down. Their quarrel was patched up shortly afterward when Ames rescued Sally Desmond from a murderer.

Sally Desmond, one of the most beautiful girls Ames had ever seen, worked

in the Halcyon dance hall. Although her reputation was above reproach, Ames's strict code of morals would not let him approve of Sally's occupation, nor of the girl herself. However, Steve Yates was infatuated with her, and he thanked Ames for saving her life.

Ames, his work attracting the attention of William Sharon, head of the Virginia City branch of the bank, was sent to San Francisco on a confidential mission to the bank there. While waiting for a train at Reno he was kidnaped and taken to a shack where two bullies demanded that he tell them the message he was carrying. When they started to torture him, Ames seized the revolver of one of them and killed them both. He got to San Francisco, however, and won the admiration of William Ralston, head of the bank, with his tale of the bandit

This story began in the *Argosy* for May 27.

encounter. His trip came to no avail, though, when Col. James Fair and John Mackay, the two mine owners Sharon and Ralston were fighting, turned the tables on the bankers.

Another girl Ames has met, one who impresses him much more favorably than Sally Desmond, is Lulu Devon, daughter of one of the millionaire mine owners, John Devon.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MODERN YOUNG WOMAN.

THAT night Percival Ames dined at the Devon mansion, with no other guests present, an honor secured for him by Lulu Devon, who told her parents frankly that she liked him better than any youth she had ever met and didn't want a lot of people around to prevent her from improving her acquaintance with him.

Mr. Devon protested that the boy had no money. Mrs. Devon informed him that Ames came of a fine Boston family and that, having cash themselves, what they needed was social position.

"You got it," declared the mine owner. "There ain't anybody in Virginia City that ain't glad to invite us to their house."

Mrs. Devon sniffed. "Virginia City! We ain't going to live here all our lives and I want us to be in the swim in New York and Boston."

"Money talks," he retorted. "They'll run after us wherever we go."

"A lot you know about it," she said with a sneer.

"You never been any place I haven't been," John Devon retorted with a big laugh.

Mrs. Devon was not crushed. "I know what's goin' on in the world if you don't," she replied. "You know

what happened to the Bowens when they went east and traveled all over Europe after they made their millions out here. They never got admitted to a refined home in spite of all their money."

"Mother's right, dad," said Lulu. "They couldn't even see the American Ambassadors in London and Paris. But I don't care anything about Mr. Ames's family. He is nice. He knows more than any man out here and he's fun. Claudia thinks so, too, don't you, Claudia?"

"He seems a gentlemanly person," admitted the elder sister. "Lulu monopolized him that night at Clark's so I didn't have a chance to talk with him."

"He's mine. I saw him first," declared the younger girl. "And don't you try to get him away from me."

"A lot of fuss about a beggarly bank clerk," commented the husband and father. "Though this boy is going to get along. Sharon's taken him up and that means he may amount to something. Have him up to-morrow night if you like, mother."

Cocktails may have been invented in 1873 but they were not served in nice homes. When Ames arrived for dinner at six o'clock—the Devons had only recently changed the name of their evening meal from supper to dinner—the family were assembled in the parlor and the butler immediately announced that dinner was served.

Ames opened his eyes at the grandeur of the dining room which was far more splendid than that possessed by the Clarks. It was furnished in the expensive ugliness of the mid-Victorian period, but the Bostonian, having no perspective upon the furniture makers of his time, was not aware that the buffet, the massive table and the big

chairs were hideous. The display of silver was impressive, the livery of the butler and footman was gaudy but costly and only Lulu Devon, in Percival's opinion, looked as though she belonged in the midst of such elegance.

He was placed between Lulu and Claudia at the big round table and Lulu would have been annoyed to know that he admired the blond girl's perfect profile though admitting that Lulu's coloring and vivacity made her the more attractive.

John Devon, stiff and uncomfortable because Mrs. Devon had insisted that he put on evening clothes, looked to Ames as though he ought to be the gardener or the man of all work in an establishment as fine as this. And he thought that Mrs. Devon would have appeared to better advantage at the kitchen stove.

Like true American parents the Devons permitted their children to do all the talking and Lulu and Claudia asked the guest a hundred questions about the great cities of the East which they had never seen. To Ames it was a delightful change from the indifferent meals and the nondescript company in his boarding house and he marveled to see brook trout and wild duck appear on the table; delicacies which were hard to get back home.

He observed that Devon ate with his knife and had dirty fingernails and that Mrs. Devon was in terror of her English butler. On the other hand, he had been long enough in Virginia City to respect them for what they were, good, honest, capable people who had earned a great fortune and were trying hard to acquire social graces.

There was champagne with the fish and more with the roast and, accompanying the coffee, came cordials and cigars. The ladies rose after they had

sipped their coffee. Mrs. Devon wagged a roguish finger at the two men and said, "Now, don't sit here too long," and led the girls out of the room.

WHEN the door was closed, Devon pushed back his chair, pulled off his coat and unfastened his collar.

"Damned if I'm not going to be comfortable," he declared. "Peel, young feller, peel."

"I'm perfectly comfortable, thank you," replied Ames, smiling.

"I ain't been since I made my pile," confided the millionaire. "Women raise hell with a man as soon as he makes a little money. I was talking to Sharon to-day and he told me what happened to you when he sent you to Frisco."

"Yes, sir?"

"Aw, forget the 'sir.' We're at home here. Yes, boy, he told me all about you making sieves out of a couple of bums and burning up half of Reno. Sharon and me are like that." He held up two fingers close together.

"I hope you won't mention the affair, Mr. Devon. It might make things very unpleasant for me."

"Who do you calculate done it?"

"Mr. Sharon says that Fair and Mackay had me waylaid."

"Naw," replied his host. "Sharon's ready to believe that they'd scalp a man like red Indians because he hates 'em so much." He chuckled. "After what happened to-day in Frisco he'll hate 'em worse. Played right into Jim Fair's hands, he did. Suited Fair to a T, that investigation did."

"I surmised that something had gone wrong," admitted Ames.

"I know John Mackay and Jim Fair better than most," continued Devon.

"I've worked with them and I've fought 'em. They're as good as the next man, Ames. They won't dance when Sharon fiddles like the rest of us. They might have had you nabbed and searched but they wouldn't tell a man to use a red-hot poker on you. No sirree."

"Then who was responsible, Mr. Devon?" Ames asked eagerly.

"This town is full of bad characters," replied the miner, "that would give their eyeteeth to get an advance tip on what Sharon is tellin' Ralston and what Ralston is tellin' Sharon. I've bought information myself and Sharon or Fair and Mackay would pay a good price for inside information and ask no questions about how it was got. And, if it was about how the market was going, these speculators would hop in and clean up."

"But how could they know that I was carrying a message for Ralston?"

"Just the fact that you worked in Sharon's bank and was going to Frisco would be all they wanted to know."

He pulled on his coat, fastened his collar, tossed off a half tumbler of Benedictine and moved toward the front of the house. Ames followed.

AFTER a few minutes of inane chatter, Mrs. Devon said something about conferring with the cook, threw a speaking glance at her husband and left the room. Devon grinned broadly, rose, said good night and went upstairs. Claudia sat with folded hands on the sofa smiling vacuously. Lulu grinned like a triumphant kitten at Ames.

"Come on into the library," she invited. "I want to show you our books. Oh, you needn't come, Claudia."

"I do not care to," Claudia answered in dudgeon. "I'm going upstairs to

write some letters. *Au revoir*, Mr. Ames."

And so the younger Miss Devon was left alone with her man exactly as she had planned.

Ames looked at the array of books with approval. "I had no idea that anybody out here possessed such a library," he said as he walked to the shelves and inspected the titles.

"We've got about everything they have in the East except good society," replied Lulu, "and, since you came, we're getting that."

"Really, Miss Devon, you flatter—heavens! What can your father be thinking of?"

"What?" asked Lulu, stepping to his side.

"Boccaccio, the Heptameron, Balzac!"

"Well?" she challenged.

"They ought to be under lock and key."

"So I couldn't read them, I suppose," she said resentfully.

"They are not for young ladies."

"But you've read them."

"Y-es."

"Men are so tiresome," she declared. "They want to keep us in cotton wool and they don't want us to know anything and, after they marry us, they complain because we are stupid. Some day women will do everything that men do. Drink and smoke and—"

"I hope not," he said quickly.

"Of course we couldn't ever be as disgusting as men, but we'll be just as well informed and we'll stop wearing ridiculous clothes"—she slapped herself contemptuously upon the bulging bustle—"and we'll wear trousers when we go riding so that we can straddle a horse and we'll be partners of men instead of poor, weak dependents."

"Mortals instead of angels," he replied reproachfully.

"Rubbish! You know we are not angels. You can walk a few blocks down the hill and go into any saloon and find women. What are angels doing in saloons?"

"Of course there are bad women."

"Nothing of the sort," retorted Lulu. "Unlucky women. Girls who have no parents and are foolish enough to believe what men tell them. Oh, you men! Suppose I was a poor girl and had to earn my living. What could I do? Scrub floors and wash dishes or walk the streets. I suppose the pretty ones try being drudges and get sick of it. There ought to be decent, well paid occupations for women, but a poor girl can only marry a drunken laborer or become a courtesan."

AMES was shocked but interested. "Where did you get such ideas?" he demanded.

"Well, I've read a lot and I use my mind to think with," she retorted. "I don't talk like this to most men I meet but I thought that you were broad minded and understanding. You're like all the rest of them."

"I don't wish to seem narrow but, obviously, women for—er—reasons—require masculine protection—"

"Then why not protect them? Why force women into debauchery through poverty?"

"It's a problem that men have been studying for ages, Miss Devon—"

"And they've done nothing about it. We're not supposed to talk about our past, we Devons, now that we are rich and tony, but other people will tell you all about us. Ten years ago my father was working a hoist at the Ophir for four dollars a day and we lived in a mean little cabin and went barefooted,

at least Claudia and I did. A mucker's family lived next door and I used to play with his little girl. She was the prettiest thing you ever saw and so sweet. I loved her. By and by dad got hold of a claim, somehow, and began to dig for himself. He struck it rich and we moved away.

"The girl was in my class in school until her father died and she had to go to work. Claudia and I used to see her once in a while on the street. We had fine clothes and she was a servant girl. And the next I heard of her she was working in a restaurant down near the Gould and Curry mine. Finally she went into a dance hall. Once in a while I meet her in the street and I always stop and speak to her. I don't despise her. Do you know why?"

"Why?"

"Well, it might have been my father who died without striking ore instead of the father of Sally Desmond."

"Sally Desmond!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, the girl you saved from being choked to death. That's why I was anxious to be friends with you."

"But we talked about her the other night at Clark's. Why didn't you tell me you knew her?"

"There was a crowd. I get sort of excited when I think of things. Why did you move out of the boarding house? So you wouldn't be led astray?"

Ames bit his lip. "You are a most extraordinary young lady," he stammered.

"I didn't mean to offend you," she said contritely. "Most men would have jumped at the chance of an intrigue with a gorgeous creature like Sally. You know why I get so worked up when I think of her? It's because it might so easily have been Claudia and I who were working in the Halcyon

instead of Sally Desmond. She's not bad. She's unlucky."

HE gazed at her flushed face and her shining dark eyes and her full ripe lips which were trembling with emotion and he made up his mind that this was an extraordinarily fine young person even if she did read forbidden books.

"I agree with you about Miss Desmond," he said gravely. "She is unfortunate and it's such a pity. Now let's change a painful subject."

"If I were a man I would go mad about Sally Desmond," she declared. "She is ravishing."

"I find you very lovely, Miss Devon."

She dropped him a curtsy. "And I don't find you disagreeable, Mr. Ames. Would you like me to sing and play for you? I sing worse than Phoebe Clark and play worse than her sister. You see, dad wouldn't let me go east to a finishing school. How would you like to go to the theater with us soon? The new stock company is good and they're playing 'East Lynne' next week. I hear it's too mournful for words. Say yes and I'll make father take a box."

"I should be delighted."

Lulu seated herself—during the whole period of their discussion they had been standing.

"Would you like to keep company with me?" she demanded abruptly. Ames was so startled that he actually shook.

"I love to say things that I shouldn't," declared the unmaidenly maiden. "I know that I should keep inviting you to call and gradually, imperceptibly you would learn that we were keeping company."

"I find you delightfully refreshing,"

he said unsteadily. "You are the most natural person I ever met."

"And you positively are coy," she replied, laughing up at him.

"If I am, it is because I remember that I am a small salaried clerk and your father is very wealthy. I doubt if your parents would permit me—"

"Wouldn't they?" she answered quickly. "Mother is all for you. She thinks that it would be wonderful to be connected with an old Boston family. And dad says that you will get along out here. Oh, we have discussed you, Mr. Ames. We are rich and vulgar. You are poor and refined. What could be sweeter?"

"I assure you, Miss Devon—"

"If you are keeping company with me, call me Lulu."

"Thank you, I shall," he declared. "And I'll be in your company as much as I am allowed. On one condition—"

"Yes?"

"I don't like you to read those particular books. It makes me uncomfortable to think of you soiling your mind—"

"Well, maybe I won't," she said reluctantly. "I don't know that I entirely approve of you, though. And you don't entirely approve of me. Let's be friends for a while and see what happens."

At ten o'clock Ames said good night, after promising to drop in after dinner the following evening. He was elated and a little frightened at the rapid progress he had made into the good graces of Lulu Devon. Why, the girl had practically flung herself at his head. If he liked, he could marry the daughter of one of the richest men in Virginia City and his financial future would be assured.

He walked down the hill and turned into C Street which was brightly

lighted and filled with the usual heterogeneous crowd.

Night was kind to Virginia City. Darkness enshrouded the bleak hills, hid the hideous smelters below, and blotted out the unpainted shacks that straggled down the hill below C Street. The yellow gaslight from the street lamps and the brilliantly illuminated shops and cafés displayed a fine broad avenue lined with pretentious buildings and filled with picturesque people on foot and in vehicles.

Anything could happen here and most everything did. Ames knew that his blood coursed more rapidly through his veins than it had back in stodgy, sedate Boston. During the few weeks of his sojourn in Virginia City he had experienced more adventure than in his entire life back home and he had advanced further in business than he would have traveled in ten years as a clerk in a Boston bank.

CHAPTER XVII.

TROUBLE APLENTY.

IN his abstraction, Ames passed his street and wandered on past the International Hotel and there he was violently torn from his meditations by a powerful hand which gripped his shoulder and swung him around.

"Hey!" exclaimed a high pitched, familiar voice. "Where you goin' all by yourself, eh?"

Ames looked in astonishment upon a transfigured Archibald Clark. The bank manager's face was flushed, his necktie was twisted to the left and there was a wide grin upon his usually stern and dignified countenance.

"Good evening, sir," he stammered.

"Come on in and have a drink," commanded Clark, who caught him by

the right arm and proceeded to drag him toward the street entrance of the hotel bar. "I'm wild and woolly and full of fleas. I'm an old she-wolf from Washoe, that's who I am."

"Really, Mr. Clark."

"Mother and the girls have gone to Frisco," explained the banker. "I gave me a night out, I did. What you going to have, young man?"

"Beer," replied Ames, smiling broadly. Clark was certainly on the loose.

"Rye," corrected Clark. "Man's drink. You're a man, ain't you? You stood off a howling mob, didn't you? You captured a bandit, didn't you? You set a town on fire—"

"Mr. Clark!" pleaded Ames with a frightened glance around.

"So you got to learn to drink like a man." Clark threw a fat arm over the youth's shoulder. "I like you," he declared. "You and me come from New England, we do. We're a couple of Pilgrim fathers, we are. We're smart. Too sharp for these simpletons out here. I'm goin' to make you a rich man, Ames. I'm rich myself and going to be richer. You leave everything to me, Ames."

Ames reluctantly drank his rye. While he was not a teetotaler, his parents had never failed to remind him that "Wine was a mocker and strong drink was raging." And for a young man who had to make his way in the world, it was wise not to acquire a craving for alcohol.

The whisky warmed his stomach and caused him to be amused by the spectacle of a great man who was half seas over. His protest against a second drink was weak and quickly overruled. He now regretted that the bar was almost empty and that there was no excitement and said so.

"That's what I was thinking," declared Clark. "You and me will circulate a little, eh?"

"I would be pleased to."

"Funny thing," remarked Clark. "For an hour I been looking for company. Sharon's in town but he's a stick. Did you ever realize that Sharon looks exactly like a crocodile, Ames?"

"No, sir. Certainly not."

"Yup. Cold blooded. Never takes a drink if he can help it. Thinks only of money. I hate money," he declared surprisingly. "What good is it? And another thing, boy. A married man can't have any fun in this town. The women watch us like cats. Can't get a night hardly ever."

This was so very sad that tears came into the banker's eyes.

"You're a lucky feller. Bachelor. You can raise ructions and nobody to stop you. Wine, women and song, eh? Which is a good idea. Come on."

"Where are we going?" demanded Ames who knew he was affected by the two drinks and was struggling to keep his head.

"Down the line," declared the banker. He threw a twenty dollar gold piece on the bar and told the barman to keep the change, which would have convinced Ames that the man was drunk if there hadn't been other evidence of the fact.

THEY walked south on C Street, turned into an ornate bar, had another drink and returned to the street.

At the Halcyon, Clark paused and gazed waggishly at his companion.

"Women," he said. "They got the most beautiful women in the world in here."

Ames tingled all over. Sally Desmond was an employee of this place.

It was his business to keep away from Sally Desmond but, if he refused to comply with the whimsies of his chief, he would be in hot water. And he wanted to go in. Without protest he followed the big man through the bar and through the entrance to the dance hall.

For a moment he was dazzled at the brilliant spectacle. A score of couples were dancing. While some of the men were in dress suits there was a certain proportion wearing red flannel shirts and high boots, but all the women were gowned for the evening and the multitudinous gaslights were kind to bare necks and shoulders and arms.

The manager greeted Clark warmly.

"Haven't seen you here for a long time, Mr. Clark."

"The wife put a damper on my activities," confessed Clark. "But she's gone to Frisco. I'm making a night of it. Know this young man? Name of Ames."

The manager grinned in friendly fashion at the Bostonian.

"Heard Mr. Ames make a mighty eloquent speech on a certain occasion," he said with a wink. "Glad to know you, sir. How about a box, Mr. Clark?"

"That's the idea," declared the banker. "One of those secluded ones."

The manager led them around toward the left side of the hall. Behind the rows of tables on the floor was a raised platform where, partially screened by curtains, were railed off inclosures each containing a table and chairs.

At several tables were a number of young women sitting without escorts and their bright eyes fastened upon the newcomers. The effect of so many beautiful women was confusing to Ames and, being naturally shy, he

dared not look at them though he was eager to discover Sally Desmond. She rose from a table and appeared suddenly before them, smiling radiantly.

"Why, good evening, Mr. Ames," she said. "I—I didn't expect to see you here."

"Fine," exclaimed Clark. "You come along with us. And you."

He beckoned to a dark girl with very bold black eyes who immediately hung herself on his arm.

"Would you like me to sit with you?" asked Sally of Ames, very softly.

"Ye-s," he stammered. "If—if it's all right."

"It's our business to entertain the customers," she said gravely, and she took his arm and followed the couple ahead.

They seated themselves in a box and a waiter appeared magically to take or rather to give the order.

"A couple of bottles of wine," he proposed.

Clark gazed at him contemptuously. "Who asked you to say anything?" he demanded. "A half a dozen bottles of wine and be quick about it."

THEY seated themselves at the small round table. Ames's knees were forced to touch those of Sally and the contact almost unmanned him.

"I haven't seen you since that night," she said reproachfully. "I wrote you. Didn't you get my letter?"

"Yes, Miss Desmond."

"I don't suppose it was worth answering," she said humbly. A wave of disgust for his own snobbishness swept over him.

"I—I intended to," he stammered.

"Say," exclaimed Clark. "You're

the girl that almost got strangled. Ames got into your room and caught the murderer. Clara just told me."

"Mr. Ames was very brave," said Sally ardently. "I'll be grateful to him as long as I live."

"Bet it wasn't the first time he got into your room, eh, Ames?" remarked the banker roguishly.

Ames's hands were in his lap. His fist clenched and the girl's hand clasped it and squeezed it warningly.

"You're sort of drunk, aren't you?" Sally observed with a forced laugh. "I never set eyes on Mr. Ames before he came to my rescue. I'm a decent girl, Mr. Clark."

"Well, that's too bad," replied the banker. "Are you a decent girl?" he demanded of Miss Clara.

"Got to be," she said candidly. "Lose our jobs if we ain't."

"Suppose I got you a better job?"

"Could I depend on that?" she asked archly.

"No," he retorted with a sudden shift of mood. "I like blondes better. Ames, I'm falling in love with your blonde."

"Won't do you a bit of good," Clara informed him. "Better pay attention to me. If I like a gentleman I can be very nice to him."

"How about a little kiss?" demanded Clark, turning toward his siren.

"That never did anybody any harm, I suppose," replied the young woman. Clark grasped her by the back of the neck, dragged her over upon his ample chest and pressed his lips against her painted ones.

"Are you supposed to do that sort of thing?" asked Percival disgustedly.

Sally shook her head. "I don't," she said. "Girls do as they like within bounds. There is a lot of kissing in the Halcyon."

The waiter, arriving with a half dozen bottles of champagne, interrupted the sentimental exchange across the table.

"How many shall I open now, sir?" he demanded.

"Open 'em all. Like to hear 'em pop," declared the banker.

"But they'll get flat, sir."

"They won't be long enough standing," Clark answered with a big laugh. "Have another dozen bottles in reserve."

"You're a man after my own heart," declared Miss Clara who stretched out her hand for the little brass checks which the waiter proffered. She pushed three of them across the table.

"Is he paying for everything?" asked Sally in a whisper.

Ames laughed. "I certainly hope so," he replied. "He's a millionaire—and I'm not."

Sally picked up the checks and put them in her purse. "I don't want to make money off of you," she said with a smile.

"Come on and dance. I used to be the best waltzer in the State of Vermont," boasted Clark.

He dragged the willing Clara out of the booth. Ames was alone with Sally.

"WHAT an existence!" Ames muttered. "Do you have to sit and drink with any man who comes along?"

"We're supposed to," she admitted. "But I know so many men that I can choose a little. I'm glad it's you, tonight."

"Suppose they want to kiss you?" he asked, and he was surprised to feel jealousy at the thought.

She smiled. "I know how to stop

them. A girl can usually manage a man unless he has had too much liquor and, if she can't, she can leave and report him to the manager."

"Why do you work in a place like this? You're not a hard, brazen female like that one with Clark."

Sally smiled bitterly. "I'm hard. She's soft. She's had two warnings about behaving, but she is trying to catch a man who will set her up in a place of her own."

"It's horrible. Why do you do it?" he persisted.

Sally lifted her white shoulders. "Why do you work in a bank? I'd prefer a bank myself but they don't hire women."

"Isn't there some other way to make a living?"

"You bet. I could be a servant girl or a waitress. Do you suppose the men let you alone? I'm safer here than working in a lodging house or in a restaurant. And there's no money in those jobs."

"Is there in this?"

"I've made as high as two hundred a week," she boasted.

"Getting men drunk," he said contemptuously.

Sally's Irish temper got the better of her. "Listen, Mr. Ames," she said hotly. "You don't have to get men drunk. They attend to it. And I can't help it if you don't like the way I earn a living. What do you care? You're a stuck-up dude from Boston who thinks he's better than anybody else. Oh, I didn't mean that. Please don't go."

He had half risen, but he sat down again.

"I beg your pardon," he said stiffly. "Of course I have no right to criticize. But it is a pity that a girl as beautiful as you are should have to put up with

people like Clark and myself because we happen to choose this particular dance hall."

She sighed. "I don't suppose anybody else in this town would let that bother him. You're awful different, Mr. Ames. Darn it, they're coming back."

CLARK thumped the Bostonian heavily on the back. "You're slow as cold molasses," he declared. "You ain't even hugging the girl. Here, you take Clara and I'll talk to this little blonde."

"Your wine is getting stale," remarked Sally.

"That's right, that's right." He tossed off a glass of champagne and immediately poured himself another. Clara moved her chair closer to Ames, leaned against him and threw her bare arm over his shoulder. It was wet with perspiration and he, ungallantly, threw it off.

"Oh," she said huffily. "You don't like me much, do you?"

"I'm sorry. Let's remember our table manners," he answered stiffly.

"The dickens with you," she retorted. "I like my fat uncle here better anyway."

"Don't bother me," said Clark. "I'm busy with this one." So speaking, the banker threw both arms around Sally Desmond and endeavored to press his bearded lips to her soft red ones. He encountered the palm of Sally's hand.

He grasped it with his right hand, pulled it away, caught her with his left hand by the back of the neck and, despite her struggles, very nearly achieved his purpose.

Ames had risen in his chair. His hands were tightly clenched. He was fighting desperately to control himself.

Clark was drunk but he was his host and his employer. Sally earned her living by catering to the entertainment of those who bought wine. If he interfered, he would be thrown out of the bank. But his blood was boiling to see the young girl in the grip of the amorous old debauchee. He couldn't stand it.

And then he met the eyes of Sally Desmond which were piteous and appealing.

"Let her go, Mr. Clark," he demanded. "Don't you see she doesn't want to be kissed by you?"

"What do I care what the girl wants," panted Clark. "Damn you, don't try to claw me."

Two steps carried Ames around the table. He grasped his employer's arms and tore them away from the girl's body.

Clark jumped up, his eyes blazing with drunken fury.

"Why, you rat," he snarled. "You dirty little pen-wiper. Lay hands on me, will you?" He swung with all the force of his two hundred pounds at the understrapper who dared to object to the conduct of his employer.

Having completely lost all sense of discretion, Percival Ames dodged the blow and as Clark's furious countenance was temptingly close, he hit it with all his force with clenched right fist.

Mr. Clark fell over backwards, blood spurting from his nose, and then strong hands grasped the Bostonian, dragged him out of the box, rushed him across the ballroom floor, shoved him through the exit, ran him out of the pool room and propelled him violently into the street. A moment later his hat was tossed after him, was caught by a wag on the sidewalk who threw it toward a pal and it fell, finally, in the middle

of the street to be run over immediately by a passing hack.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A BLASTED CAREER.

WHEN Percival Ames reported at the bank next morning he found a young man from the accounting department sitting at his desk.

"Good morning, Mr. Ames," said the clerk. "A letter for you."

"Has Mr. Clark arrived?" asked Ames as he tore open the envelope.

"Been here an hour."

Ames crushed the letter in his hand. As he had expected, it was a notice of dismissal. He shrugged his shoulders and turned away, then walked to the cashier's window and presented his passbook.

"I want to close my account, Mr. Morton," he said.

The cashier shook his head.

"Sorry," he replied. "Your funds were attached as soon as the doors opened. Here is the legal notice."

Blankly, Ames accepted the slip of paper. It was a notice of suit for damages to one John Smith, who alleged assault with intent to kill.

Ames grew pale with anger, but he realized that it was useless to argue with the cashier and more than useless to demand an interview with Clark. As he turned away, William Sharon entered the bank briskly. Ames intercepted him.

"May I have a word with you, sir?" he asked eagerly.

Sharon's cold eyes inspected him.

"You will have to make it brief," he said. "Come into my office."

Ames told him succinctly what had occurred the night before and how the

bank manager had revenged himself. Sharon heard him without a change of expression.

"What do you expect me to do?" he asked curtly.

"Do you think it fair—just—"

The banker interrupted him.

"Young man," he said. "Mr. Clark is an important official of this bank. You are a nobody. If he had been sober, he certainly would not have chosen you as a companion of the evening, therefore you took advantage of his condition when you accompanied him into this dance hall. The young women are employed there to persuade men to buy wine and are not in the least likely to be offended by familiarity from customers who are under the influence. You made a fool of yourself. It is obvious that you can be of no value to this bank after your assault upon its manager and you can be of no further use to me. Good morning."

"I expect to leave the bank's employ, sir, but is it fair to prevent me from drawing out my savings?"

"That is a legal attachment, is it not? I can do nothing about it. Good morning. Your dismissal notice entitles you to your pay unless it also is attached. That's all, Mr. Ames."

Ames returned to the cashier's window and presented the crumpled note of dismissal.

"Sorry," remarked the cashier. "All funds coming to you are attached."

SO Percival Ames wandered out into the street and gazed vacantly up and down. The banker's revenge was so far reaching, so complete, that it dazed him. In his pocket were a dozen cartwheels, silver dollars, and after he had spent them he would be penniless. Knowing the influence of the bank, he was certain that the suit

against him would not speedily be tried. The case of "John Smith" against Percival Ames could not come to trial. Not content with kicking him into the street, Archibald Clark had robbed him.

And it was not likely that he would get another job. Clark would pass the word up and down and nobody would dare employ him. Yesterday in receipt of a good salary with five hundred dollars in the bank. To-day a vagrant, to all intents and purposes.

Ames thrust out his jaw. He would fight. He wouldn't let them lick him when right was on his side. He would make Clark regret that he had begun a persecution against a man who had defended a woman in distress. Somehow, some way—He wandered up C Street and finally his eyes rested upon a sign on a frame building across the street. "*Territorial Enterprise*."

That was it. Publicity. How would Archibald Clark like to have his despicable conduct made public? He crossed the street, climbed a rickety flight of stairs to the editorial rooms and pushed open the door at the top.

Here was where Mark Twain had worked as a reporter ten years before. Here was a fearless journal which had the whole city for its readers.

The editorial room was shabby, littered and empty save for a small man with ragged chin whiskers who sat with his feet on his desk and smoked a pipe. He had a shiny bald head, small twinkling eyes, a prominent nose and a whimsical mouth. A pair of silver rimmed glasses rested on the top of his head.

"Enter, pilgrim," he chirped. "Rest your weary bones if you can find a clean chair. Name of Percival Ames. Habitat Boston, occupation knight errant."

"You know me?" asked the astonished young man.

"Positively. The *Enterprise* sees all, knows all and prints damn little."

"Why do you call me a knight errant, sir?"

"Didn't you face the Vigilantes? And didn't you whip Archibald Clark in the Halcyon last night?"

Ames fell into a chair and gazed at the little man incredulously.

"You know about last night?" he gasped.

"All over town, my boy. Permit me to shake the hand that broke the nose of Archibald Clark. Congratulations! Felicitations! My name is De Quille. I'm the city editor of this great and growing journal."

PERCIVAL grinned at him. He liked him.

"But you don't know what happened this morning," he jeered.

"I'm all ears. What happened this morning?" Then, "Well, well," he said when Ames had finished. "That's damn hard luck, my boy. What is the purpose of your visit?"

"It seemed to me that the facts ought to be published."

"Certainly they should. Unfortunately the most fascinating facts rarely get into print."

"You mean that you won't publish an account of this outrage?"

"Wouldn't think of it. Haven't you learned yet that Sharon owns this town?"

"But a newspaper—"

"While we proclaim that our journal is the tribune of the people, we are a business enterprise and Sharon holds our notes. If he gave the word, we wouldn't carry an advertisement to-morrow."

"It's an outrage!"

"It's life. Now the mussing up of Archibald Clark tickled every man on this paper. Why isn't the story on the front page of our journal? Because we are afraid to print it. Disgraceful, isn't it?"

"But this suit—this John Smith who claims that I assaulted him. Surely you can tell the facts about that."

"Not important enough to get into trouble about, young feller. What are your plans?"

"I have none."

"You'd better go to another city."

"I'm damned if I will."

"Shake. There is one outfit in this town which thumbs its nose at Sharon. Its end is inevitable but it is still carrying on. Know what I mean?"

"Fair and Mackay?"

"And Flood and O'Brien. First-class fighting men. Know John Mackay?"

"I was introduced to him on a train a few days ago."

"He has a grand sense of humor," said the city editor thoughtfully. "Maybe he would be amused to think of Archibald Clark with a bloody nose. And maybe he would give a job to a man who had nerve enough to hit the big thief. You walk right over to the Consolidated Virginia and ask John Mackay to give you a job. Tell him I sent you."

Ames rose. "I appreciate very much—" he began in a voice which trembled.

"Pshaw. You tell John I sent you. Hurry now. You may catch him before he goes below ground."

COLONEL JAMES FAIR and John Mackay were in conference when one of the neat cards which Ames had had printed was brought in by a secretary.

"Percival Ames," commented Mackay. "Don't know him."

"I do. He's the clerk that Sharon took with him when he inspected the mine," replied Fair with a grin. "Let's have him in. Find out what he wants."

"Sure, it'll do no harm," replied his partner. "Send the young man in."

Ames, very conscious of the two pairs of hard eyes which scrutinized him, stood respectfully before them.

"I remember you, young man," declared Mackay. "Met you on the Truckee railroad car the other day. Steve Yates introduced you."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, young man," snapped Fair, "what's your business?"

"I am in search of employment."

Fair laughed scornfully. "You're thick with Sharon," he said. "I know you."

"I have been discharged."

Fair shrugged his shoulders. "We have nothing," he said. "Go back and ask Bill Sharon if he takes us for fools."

"Wait a minute," suggested Mackay. "You look like a decent lad. Why were you discharged?"

"Because I had to hit Archibald Clark last night, sir. I broke his nose, I understand."

Mackay roared with laughter. "If we could believe that now!" he observed.

"Mr. de Quille of the *Enterprise* will confirm my statement, sir. He suggested I apply for work here as the only place in Virginia where I might get it."

"We are not running a bank, young man," said Fair.

Mackay rose and laid a kind hand on the applicant's shoulder.

"Tell me what happened," he commanded. "I know that Clark was

drunk last night because I met him about ten o'clock and he was well on his way."

Both partners listened with unconcealed interest to the story Ames had to tell and Mackay appeared to enjoy it thoroughly.

"Tied up his bank account," commented Fair. "That was rotten, eh, John?"

"Exactly what one might expect of that skunk Clark," replied Mackay.

"On the other hand," added Fair, "Sharon is always trying to get spies into our employ. I'm sorry, Mr. Ames—"

"Hardly likely to do it this way," declared Mackay. "Clark wouldn't take a broken nose for any scheme of Sharon's. I believe the boy, Jim."

"Suppose you tell us exactly why you went to San Francisco," proposed Fair. "I know that you called on Ralston. What message did you deliver?"

Ames hesitated and then turned resentful eyes upon the colonel.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said. "I was then in the employ of the bank and I was being paid for my services. I can't answer your question."

"Then we can't employ you."

"I'm sorry, sir."

"And I'd have kicked him out if he answered," declared Mackay.

Fair grinned. "So would I," he agreed. "But, just the same, we don't need another clerk."

Mackay looked the applicant over appraisingly. "Tell you what," he said. "You're through in Virginia City, young feller. As Dan de Quille told you, nobody would dare take you on. I'm so pleased that you broke Clark's nose that I'll buy you a ticket to Frisco. You come from Boston, don't you? By George, I'll pay your fare back home. There's an offer."

Ames didn't answer.

"Speak up," commanded Mackay.

"No," he replied firmly. "I'll not let them run me out of this town."

MACKAY pulled his mustache and grinned whimsically. "I like your spirit," he said. "You're a wiry looking fellow and you've proved you can strike a hard blow. And you've plenty of nerve. You remember, Jim, he faced the Vigilantes."

"I know that," replied his partner.

"I'll give you the only kind of job I've got," said Mackay. "Underground, young man. With a pick and shovel. A mucker. Take it or leave it."

Ames rather piteously extended his two hands, palms up. They were strong hands but white and soft. No Ames, since the first pioneer in New England, had been forced to work with his hands.

Mackay laughed softly and his eyes were kind.

"Boy," he said, "I came of a good family in Ireland. I landed in New York twenty years ago and pushed a quill in an office. When I heard about gold in California I came out here and I've been digging in tunnels most of the time since. I'll give you four dollars a day and you'll get no favors. Take it or leave it."

Percival Ames lifted his pointed chin and looked squarely into the eyes of the Irishman.

"Suppose I take it," he demanded. "What are the chances of advancement?"

Fair laughed derisively. Mackay smiled. "If ye survive bad air and heat and mine fires and battles with bráwny muckers that don't like ye, you have a good chance," he replied. "The wealth we all seek is below ground, hundreds, thousands of feet down."

The strikes have been made by ignorant men, simple men who let the thieves above ground steal their profits. But a man who knows rock, who can shovel it out faster than any man in his crew and who can climb up the shaft and meet the bankers and the stock jobbers and the politicians on their own ground—"

"Like you can, John," said Jim Fair heartily.

"And you, Jim," replied his partner with a warm smile. "Boy, that man will go far. And let me tell ye something. They're sayin' that the Comstock is played out; that only low grade ore will be produced from now on. They laugh at him and me for wrong headed fools, but I'm telling you, young feller, that what has come out of this lode is nothing to what's going to come out of it. We've sunk a million into it already. We'll sink another million but we'll get it all back a hundred-fold."

"Right," replied Fair with what seemed to Ames to be a fanatic's glitter in his eyes.

"And we're getting on, both of us. We can't be below ground many years longer. We want men we can trust, intelligent, educated men who know mining and know ore, to carry on for us. Do you want that job?"

"Yes," said Percival Ames firmly.

CHAPTER XIX.

BELOW GROUND.

AS day succeeded day, Percival Ames bitterly regretted that he had been carried away by the rude eloquence of the Irish miner. He was a mucker in a gang on the thousand foot level, a quarter of a mile, almost, below the main streets of Vir-

ginia City. He was the green hand of a savage gang; brawny, smelly, naked, rude, profane, broad-shouldered brutes with steel muscles and tireless backs, men who sneered at him, swore at him, took advantage of his ignorance, caused accidents to happen to him, made his life more hellish than the hell in which he labored.

At rest intervals they told him stories; yarns of mine fires when the timbering burst into flames and clouds of smoke and fire rushed through the workings; when the water turned to steam; when those who were not burned to a crisp were scalded to death or suffocated by smoke. And they told him of occasions when the mass of the mountain caused the stout timbers which held it up to crumple and of the miners who were crushed to death beneath the weight of millions of tons of earth.

At first he thought they were lying to frighten him, but it was not long before he found that they were lacking in powers of expression to paint the truth in its completely awful details.

His hands were blistered; his flesh fell away, his face was haggard. His back was almost broken. Every night, when he crawled out of the car which conveyed him to the surface, he swore that he would not return to work in the morning and every morning he rose when the whistles blew, put on his working clothes, picked up his dinner pail and walked doggedly to the shaft house.

He did not see Mackay again. He saw nobody he knew. Of course he had to leave his boarding place; he didn't earn enough to pay twenty dollars a week for room and board; if he had wished to stay on, the French woman would have put him out because she ran a home only for "refined

people." He secured a room in a fellow miner's cottage for six dollars a week; a room that was squalid but in which he slept like a log. He kept away from the busy part of C Street in the evening. He didn't use his mind much during this appalling apprenticeship; he was turning into a dull clod, but he was getting tough and incredibly strong.

And he was learning the mining business "from the ground down" as one might say. After a few weeks his fellow workers decided that he had been "initiated" sufficiently and admitted him into their rough company. They were grossly ignorant men, these muckers. They were Scotch and Irish, English cockneys, Australians and Mexicans.

They set off blasts and swung their picks and shoveled the rock into the handcars and didn't know good ore from bad and didn't care.

But, as Ames grew accustomed to the grueling labor, his mind became active again and his curiosity awakened. At night when he left the shaft he would pick up a book or pamphlet on silver mining at a bookstore and read it in his miserable room before he fell asleep. And he sensed that there were activities in the Consolidated Virginia of which the ordinary mucker had no suspicion.

He began to surmise that the ore he and his gang were getting out was stuff which wouldn't pay for the smelting of it and he wondered why. From miners talk he picked up that men were sleeping somewhere in the mine, and then he became aware that so-called "Secret Shifts" of men were working below him.

At first he had shaved meticulously every morning before going to work, but inside of a week he had begun to

let his beard grow. During the first two weeks he lost ten pounds but in the next two weeks he regained it. His muscles bulged; his back became powerful. He ate enormously and burned it off in the workings.

How amazingly his appearance had changed he did not realize until one evening when he came out of a bookstore and almost collided with Lulu Devon, who was passing on the arm of her father. Of course he wore the red flannel shirt and corduroy trousers and high boots of a miner and his face was covered with several inches of black beard but he expected and feared recognition. Lulu glanced at him casually and passed on. He smiled bitterly and climbed the hill to the cabin where he resided. That was the end of that.

On two occasions he encountered Steve Yates without being recognized, which did not distress him, but it was not to be expected that he would run into Sally Desmond whose work at the Halcyon began before Ames came above ground and ended when he was deep in the sleep of an exhausted man.

During his bitter apprenticeship he had decided to save his wages until he had money enough to take him east but it was impossible to save on four dollars a day in Virginia City. If he threw up this job he would be exactly where he was when he had been mad enough to accept it.

Often he reflected that, if he had been shrewd enough to escape from Clark before entering the Halcyon that night, he might have been fixed for life by this time. Lulu Devon had been willing and her parents would deny her nothing that she craved. A week or two of courtship, the announcement of their engagement, and he soon would have had a millionaire for a father-in-

law. And Lulu was sweet, pretty and would have made him a good wife.

IT happened one night that Ames had burned the gas in his chamber later than usual while studying an interesting article about draining water out of silver mines and he was tired when he reported to work the following morning. The morning was long and the afternoon interminable. It seemed as if he could not keep his feet until the time came to knock off work. As the men threw down their tools, Ames slid to the floor of the tunnel.

"Come on, Boston," called a Scotch laborer who trudged past him.

"Coming," he muttered and his lids dropped over his tired eyes. In a second he was fast asleep and his mates piled into the waiting lift without a thought of him. In that hole a thousand feet underground, his back against a jagged rock, his legs stretched out in mud, he slept peacefully and

heavily for several hours. Waking with a start he thought he had gone blind, for the darkness was impenetrable. With an imprecation he started up. The mine was deserted, the last car had climbed the shaft incline, he was doomed to remain in the hot, fetid hole until morning.

His lantern had gone out but he knew where there was an oil can and he relighted it. As he never wore his watch to work he had no notion of the hour. He was ravenously hungry like all men who have labored hard for a long period and who have missed their dinner. Nothing to do but tighten his belt and wait.

Boom! The muffled roar of a blast not far away fell upon his ears. He stiffened and listened. He moved a little way in the direction of the sound.

Five minutes later a second blast went off and he located it. It seemed to come from a drift which he knew to be abandoned. The Secret Shifts!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



Where Poverty Is Unknown

IS there a Paradise on earth? Visitors who have been to the Tonga or Friendly Islands say yes. This island group is situated southeast of the Fijis in the south Pacific Ocean, has a total area of about 390 square miles.

So far, the world depression has not touched the islands. Poverty is practically unknown, and where it occurs it is quickly corrected by the government. The law provides that any male reaching the age of sixteen be given a plot of land of eight acres which he must cultivate. As the soil is very fertile, its produce is rich enough to keep its owner and his family in solid comfort. Palm trees grow in abundance.

If a man is found too lazy to attend to his not very arduous agricultural duties he is properly punished. If the owner of a plot of land dies, the property is allotted to some one else, usually a relative.

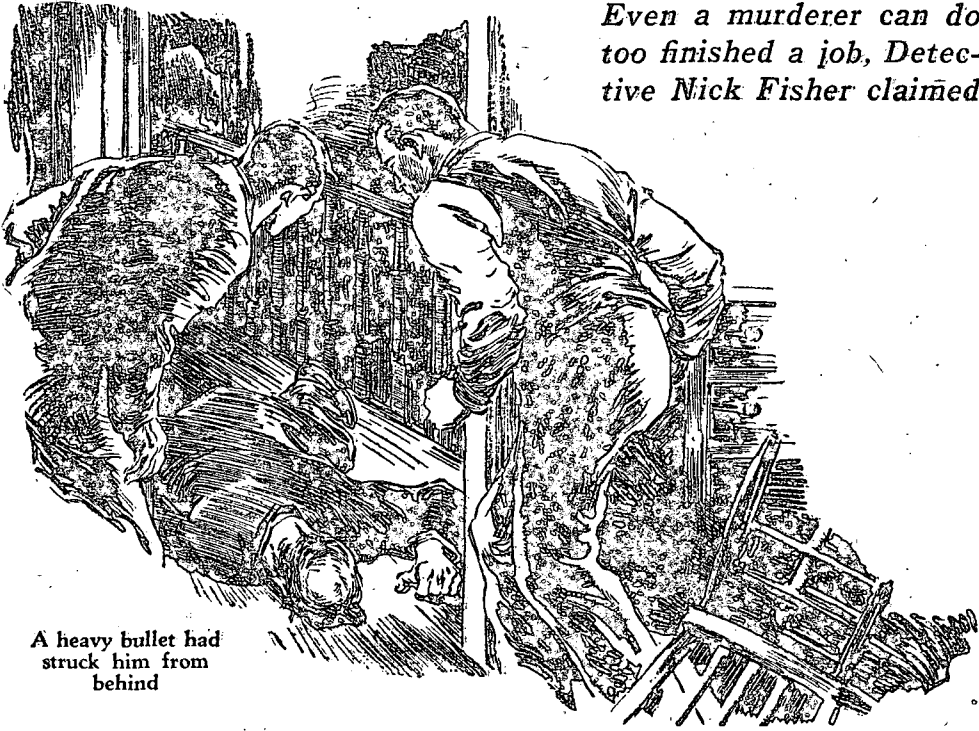
In addition to the plot of arable land, each male is given a site in the nearest village, where he is bound to build a house. Taxes are moderate, yet the government boasts a treasury surplus of 140,000 pounds sterling.

P. H. Kreibohm.

Much Too Artistic

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Even a murderer can do too finished a job, Detective Nick Fisher claimed



A heavy bullet had struck him from behind

NICK FISHER was the last to leave the table. He usually was. He was a big man; and though he could move fast enough when speed was necessary, in ordinary circumstances he disliked to hurry.

He lumbered up the three flights of stairs, exchanging lazy greetings with fellow boarders. It was a warm summer evening, and all the doors and windows in the stuffy old house were open.

When he reached the fourth floor, which was the top floor, Nick paused for a moment, listening. He shared this floor with only one other lodger, Harry Wilcox. There was an unfurnished room in the back, near the head of the stairs, the door facing down the small

corridor where one disconsolate electric bulb was burning; it was used as a trunk room, and the door was always unlocked. Halfway down the hall was the door of Wilcox's room, and Nick could hear Wilcox moving around in there, and humming. In the front was Nick's own room.

A city ordinance required the light in the hall at this hour; otherwise old Jacobs would certainly have removed it. But there still was plenty of daylight in the front room. Nick Fisher took off his coat, seated himself in a chair at the front window and started to read a magazine. After a few minutes the humming in the next room ceased and Nick heard his fellow boarder coming up the hall toward his

own room, walking slowly and rather heavily.

This was odd. In all the six weeks they had lived at Jacobs he and Wilcox never had exchanged more than nods or perfunctory phrases of greeting. The humming was unusual too. Wilcox wasn't a hummy sort of man.

There was a knock. Quickly Nick unstrapped the pistol which hung from his belt and thrust it and its holster under the pillow on the bed, next to where he sat. For he had his coat off now.

"Come in."

Wilcox was a thin man, clean-shaven, neat, sullen, with bright eyes and tiny, very sharp features. He entered without a sound; he always moved noiselessly, whatever he did, wherever he went. He closed the door behind him, and, without waiting for an invitation, sat in the only other chair in the room, facing Nick Fisher, who had not risen.

"What can I do for you?"

Wilcox did not answer at once. Deliberately, sneeringly, he studied the whole room—such as it was. Then he studied Nick Fisher, nodding; and something like a grin appeared upon his mean, thin mouth.

"Nothing," he muttered. "Except you might tell me what the hell the insurance people think they're going to gain by planting you in the next room to me in a dump like this."

"What do you mean?"

"Or maybe it was your own idea. I hear they'd be willing to pay a sweet bonus to any dick that managed to put me away for a while."

And now Nick smiled. He started to fill his pipe. "No use trying to fool you, I guess," he said good-naturedly.

"Not a bit. I spotted you the first day you appeared, which was the day

after I moved in myself. At first I didn't give a damn. But now you been hanging around so long, more'n a month now, I been beginning to wonder what it's all about. A guy as smart as you're supposed to be"—the voice was creamy with contempt—"ain't expected to waste his firm's money sitting around doing nothing."

"That, of course," Nick reminded him, "is my own business."

"Sure," said Wilcox. "Your business to go poking through my things when I'm out, too."

NICK was lighting his pipe. He raised his eyes above the bounding flame of the match he held. "How'd you know that?" he asked, once the pipe was pulling properly.

"Took it for granted. You did a neat job though, I'll give you credit for that. But naturally you didn't find anything."

"Naturally. I didn't really expect to."

"Uh-huh." The visitor did not stir, but his eyes roamed aimlessly. "I got an idea old man Jacobs is beginning to get curious too. He's wise to you, of course. I caught him kneeling outside your door here the other night, peeking in through the keyhole. That's a habit of his, anyway. I know he peeks through mine a lot too."

Nick smiled again. "So you're wondering why I'm here?"

"That's it." The eyes continued to roam, though there was no other sign of restlessness about the visitor. "You certainly don't think I'm planning any job in *this* lousy dump, do you?"

"Well, it isn't the sort of place we'd expect you to be in ordinarily, Mitch, but—"

"Wilcox to you."

"Okay. Me, I'm still Fisher. But

what I was saying is, you're not staying here for nothing."

"Of course not. I'm paying twelve bucks a week. Which is robbery, the slop they feed you."

"It is terrible stuff, isn't it? But twelve a week can't mean much to you. You must have half a million salted away by this time."

Wilcox made no reply.

"It can't mean much to old man Jacobs, either, with all the fencing cuts he's taken from the likes of you. But in his case you can understand it. He still thinks this place is a blind. He still doesn't know we're wise to him."

"Yeah, but all that don't say what you're doing here."

"No, and it doesn't say what you're doing here either, for that matter, Mitch."

"Wilcox."

"All right. Wilcox, then."

The visitor rose, sighing heavily. "I guess I ain't going to get anywheres with a guy like you."

"I guess not."

"Not that I give a damn, of course. Stick around as long as you want. Nothing's going to break here."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. In fact, almost anything might happen in this place, with things the way they are."

"What the hell do you mean by that crack, I'd like to know?"

"I'm sure you'd like to know. But if—"

He stopped because there was a shot in the hallway just outside the door. A shot—and then the sound of a body falling.

BOTH men sprang for the door, Nick snatching his gun as he went.

"Keep it under your pillow, eh?" Wilcox muttered.

Their landlord lay flat on his face in

front of the door. A heavy bullet had struck him between the shoulder blades, breaking the spine. Apparently he had been kneeling at the keyhole.

Nick Fisher raced into the trunk room, but it was unoccupied. The one window was shut and locked, and the sill was covered with undisturbed dust. He ran down the three flights of stairs, pushing his way through frightened, chattering boarders who cluttered the halls. There was nobody nearby in front, nobody at all in the rear, and the cellar door was locked from the inside.

He went back upstairs.

The body had not been moved. Wilcox, hands in pockets, face expressing nothing whatever, stood over it, staring down. On the stairs, gazing over the bannister or between the rails, but afraid to get any closer, were half a dozen boarders; Nick pushed through them and approached the corpse."

"Thank the Lord something's happened at last," he said, smiling. "Mind if I frisk you, Mitch?"

Wilcox seemed amazed, but he held out his arms. "Help yourself. I don't see what the hell you think that'll get you, though. Murder's not my business."

"I know. It's not mine, either. I just want to play safe."

The pockets yielded nothing significant. The herded boarders gaped, wondering. Wilcox looked disgusted.

"Okay. Now do you mind if I might go through your room again? The cops'll be here any minute, and things might get messed up."

"Go to it, Sherlock. Sounds like a pretty dumb act to me, though. Whoever blasted this guy is probably a long way from here by now."

Nobody around old man Jacobs's place ever had seen the huge Mr.

Fisher move so rapidly. Rarely touching anything, his fingertips quick, alert, his eyes jerking back and forth, up and down, he went through Wilcox's room from end to end in considerably less than five minutes. Only one thing held his attention, and this was a drop of liquid on the windowsill. It was colorless, and had no odor: it might have been water. Nick hurried back into his own room, got a medicine dropper and picked it up. He put the dropper into his watch pocket, upside down. Then he made a quick examination of the trunk room, touching nothing. Finally he went downstairs to telephone. The police were just arriving.

A thing like this makes for a great deal of immediate fuss. There are questions without number, reports to be prepared, charts to be drawn, forms to be filled out, photographs to be taken—all that sort of thing. The halls of the boarding house were crowded for many hours. Plain-clothes men and uniformed police swarmed all over the place. The precinct captain was there, and a deputy inspector. The commissioner himself looked in for a few minutes on his way to a banquet.

Nick Fisher was downstairs most of the time. He had identified himself only to the deputy inspector, Mulligan.

"You know more about guys like this than I do," Mulligan told him. "I suppose there were plenty of yeggs who had something against the Jacobs?"

"I suppose so. Hard to tell about men in that business. They don't trumpet their affairs all over the place the way gangsters do."

"Yeah . . . But as I get it, Jacobs was a crook among crooks. Had something on almost everybody he worked with, from what I hear."

"Yes, I guess he did," said Nick Fisher.

The captain joined them. "The only way I can figure it," the captain said, "is that somebody came up these stairs quietly and saw this fellow kneeling at the door peeking through the keyhole, and let him have it from behind. The shot must have been fired from somewhere near the head of the stairs, the way it looks."

Nick reminded him: "Practically every door in the house was open at the time, and there were people standing in most of them. But nobody saw a stranger go up or down. Three flights, remember. Three hallways."

The captain was not pleased; but since this man Fisher seemed to be a friend of the deputy, the captain was reasonably polite. "Well, what the hell else could it have been then? No windows anybody could jump out of—and live. And the guy certainly couldn't be hid anywheres on the premises. We've given it the well known fine-tooth comb." He stalked off, looking hurt, annoyed.

"DID you know Jacobs took it in the arm?" Mulligan asked.

"Sure. I even knew his dose—half a grain. That's a lot."

"What's that go to do with it?"

Nick shrugged. "Was there a needle on him?"

"Yeah."

"Empty?"

"Yeah. Wet, though. And we found another one in his bedroom. Funny thing: that one was wet too."

The captain scurried back to them. He was excited about something. He looked hard at Nick, but he addressed himself to the deputy inspector.

"Say, I just heard that this fella Wilcox is really Harris Mitchell, the

jewel crook. Nobody's ever gotten anything on him, but he's one of the biggest shots in the business and the insurance people have been trying for years—" He stopped when, glancing at Mulligan, he saw that official smiling. "Oh, yuh knew that already, eh?"

"Yes, we knew that."

The "we" did not escape the captain. He shot another poisonous glance at Nick Fisher. "Well, I'm not supposed to know things like that myself. He wasn't ever in my precinct before, and we got no jewels around this part of town for anybody to lift anyway, so how could—"

"It's perfectly all right, captain. Nobody expected you to know who he was."

"But I do think that it would be a good notion to pick this fella up and ask questions a little more rough than we can here."

"Mitchell's been asked questions like that before, captain, and nothing ever happened."

"Anyway, it looks kind of funny to me, the way it is. We got only his word for it, and the word of this man here, about their being in this man's room when it happened. I'm not calling anybody a liar, understand, but remember these two guys were the only ones on the same floor when it happened, as far as we know."

"Mr. Fisher's a friend of mine. I'll answer for him."

The captain didn't like it, but he had to take it. He grunted dubiously and walked away.

Mulligan turned to Nick. "So what do you think?"

"Don't know yet. I might get an idea in a little while, when a certain phone call comes through." He lowered his voice. "One thing I do know, though, and that is that Mitch was ex-

pecting something to happen when he was talking with me there. He's a pretty smooth customer, Mitch is, but he just couldn't keep his eyes away from that clock on my bureau all the time he was in there."

"You think he fingered Jacobs for somebody?"

Nick shook his head. "Mitch would never do a rat job like that. Not that he's above it. He just doesn't have to. He's in the big money, that fellow."

"Well, maybe he'd hired somebody to do the bang-bang act at a certain time?"

"Maybe. But if he did, it'd be the first time Mitch ever worked with anybody else on anything at all. That wouldn't be like him. He's a lone wolf if there ever was one. Most of these ice lifters are, but I never knew one as much so as Mitch. He's got plenty of confidence in himself, but not an ounce of it in anybody else at all. His one big fear in life is that somebody will get something on him. It's a mania with him. I won't say it's such a bad one, either. It's kept him out of jail all these years, anyway."

"But he must have done business with Jacobs."

"Oh, sure. He had to have a fence. And I suppose Jacobs had been trying for years, as hard as I've been trying, to get something big on him—something that'd stick. Maybe he got it, too. If he did, he could certainly milk Mitch for a lot more than his split of any reward would amount to if he turned the man in."

A UNIFORMED policeman tapped Nick's arm. "You Mr. Fisher? Well, there's a call for you on that phone back there."

The telephone was on the wall, under the staircase.

"Ootshay, kid. What's the verdict?"

"Well, it wasn't much to work on, but I managed to give it a couple of tests. I put a little in water, about one to thirty, and added a tiny bit of a test solution of ammonia, and shook it. It formed a white precipitate that dissolved very nicely in sodium hydroxide solution."

"No kidding!"

"Then I took what was left—what I hadn't used in that test—and mixed it with a little sulphuric acid that had a touch of selenous acid in it."

"Whatever happened then?"

"It turned blue first, and then green, and finally brown."

"Well, that certainly must have been very interesting to watch. But what the hell does it mean?"

"Well, it means the stuff's what you thought it was. A pretty strong solution, too, I'd say offhand."

"Fine! Why didn't you tell me that in the first place?"

Nick returned to the deputy inspector, and they had a long confab conducted entirely in whispers.

The hubbub continued until well after midnight. The body was officially examined and then removed, detectives laboriously spelled out names in their little books, photographers exploded flashlight powders, stenographers took statements from all the boarders, and there were searchings, and phone calls, and hushed conferences, and hurrys here and there. Wilcox remained in the doorway of his own room, and at no time was he alone. It was almost one o'clock when Mulligan and Nick Fisher went up to the top floor again. Mulligan dismissed two detectives who had lingered there.

"No sense hanging around any more, boys. I guess we got all we're going to get to-night. We'll come back

to-morrow, when there's a better light, and give another look-see just to be sure."

"I suppose you're going to pinch me?" Wilcox snarled.

The deputy inspector looked at him in amazement. "Why should we do that? You were in the room with Fisher here when it happened! We got nothing on you."

"Damn right you haven't! Only I figured you'd pinch me for the night anyway, just to be nasty." He stepped back into his room and slammed the door.

Mulligan said: "Well, I'll be seeing you in the morning, Fisher." He started downstairs, with the two detectives.

Nick went into his own room. He had a long piece of knotted rope under his coat, and this he unwound and lowered quietly out of the side window, first tying an end to the steam pipe. Then he went to the front window and looked down. The crowd had been dispersed, and the street was deserted. He went out into the hall and started downstairs, calling as he did so: "You going back to the station house, Mulligan?"

Mulligan's voice came from the second floor. "Yeah. Coming?"

"I'll walk as far as the end of the block with you. Want to get some pipe tobacco at that bean wagon down there."

HE joined Mulligan and the two detectives on the first floor.

They went out the front way and hurried around to a side alley, where they found Nick's rope. Nick whispered: "Make it snappy, because he will. And for Pete's sake don't make a sound when you climb in. This man's got ears like a cat."

Mulligan stayed below: he was a trifle too fat for this sort of thing. But the detectives made the climb quickly and easily, and Nick Fisher followed them. They were standing near the hall door, listening, their pistols out, when Nick arrived. One of them nodded. "He's there, all right."

"Good," said Nick. "Let's go."

All three went through the door at once, and they ran down the hall to the trunk room. The beam of an electric flashlight found Wilcox promptly. He had moved one of the trunks away from the wall between this room and the hall, and he was taking something out of a hole in the plaster. They grabbed him. Nick himself took charge of the box-like object.

"Where were you figuring on ditching this, Mitch? A heave out of your window and over the wall onto the roof of that unoccupied house across the alley—was that it? You could have picked it up there later and dismantled it, eh?"

One of the detectives handcuffed himself to Wilcox. The other went to Nick's side window and called to Mulligan, who presently came puffing up the stairs. By that time Nick had the apparatus in his own room, under a good light. The policemen examined it curiously. It consisted chiefly of a revolver, .38 caliber and hair-triggered, and an alarm clock.

"Simple enough, at that," murmured Mulligan. "But it was a smart stunt fixing it so's it would fire through that little hole in the wall right at the place he wanted."

"But then, Mitch is a smart fellow," Nick explained. "Maybe he's a little too smart, though. Anybody else would have had Jacobs bumped off by the simple procedure of getting a gunman to do the job. But not Mitch. He had

to do it all himself, so's nobody could ever have anything on him. My being there had him worried, and he hung around a long time hoping I'd get tired and quit."

MULLIGAN interrupted. "But I still can't understand how he knew Jacobs would be kneeling in front of your door right at that second."

"He put him there himself, that's how. He knew Jacobs took it in the arm, and he knew his dose. So he made up a solution of morphine sulphate himself. Stiff—probably a grain and a half, maybe even more. Jacobs had a strong heart, and Mitch probably figured it wouldn't kill him, though it was sure to put even an old addict to sleep quick."

"Mitch asked Jacobs if he could see him in his room right after dinner, figuring I'd be late, as I always was. But when Jacobs appeared, Mitch got scared he'd made up too strong a solution. Jacobs was all right at dinner; I know that, because I saw him myself. But he must have stopped in his own room on the way upstairs afterward, and given himself a shot. That would account for the needle they found there being wet. And Mitch would know, the second he saw him, that the old fellow had been taking it again."

"If Mitch killed him with the needle, then the autopsy would show it was due to an overdose instead of a bullet. Mitch didn't care how he was killed, of course, so long as he *was* killed. But an overdose, and a corpse in his own room and no chance to take it downstairs without being seen—that was not so good. You see, he'd planned to grab Jacobs the moment the old fellow walked into the room, and hold him good and hard, and give it to him in the

arm. But it might be impossible, in a struggle, to be sure he didn't shoot the whole does in and kill the old fellow.

"So instead of taking that chance, Mitch held the needle behind him for a moment and squirted a little out the window—only it didn't go all the way out. But everything else proceeded according to schedule. It was a cinch to grab an old fellow like Jacobs and stick him in the arm and then just hang on for a minute or two. About that time I came upstairs, and Mitch waited till I'd got into my room and closed the door. Then he dragged Jacobs out there and planted him on his knees in front of my door. I'd noticed he walked heavily, and Mitch never does that ordinarily. The hardest part must have been placing the old fellow just exactly right. He must have measured the whole thing pretty carefully."

"Then he went in and talked with you and waited for the gun to go off."

"Sure. But afterwards he never got a chance to get this apparatus out of the hole. There was always somebody in that hallway, or else on the stairs. Of course, he might have left it in there anyway. Probably nobody could prove anything by it, even if they did hear the ticking and found it. Mitch is

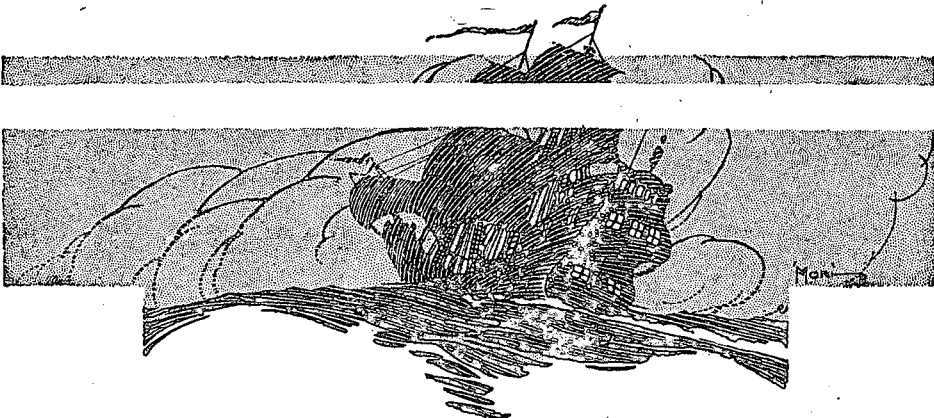
altogether too wise to leave any fingerprints, or a number on the gun you could trace it to him by, or anything like that.

"But still, why take the chance? So long as I was in here he wouldn't go after it, but when the hallway was cleared, and things had settled down, and he heard me go out for sure—why, that looked like just the right time to clean the job up. In the morning nothing would be found. The autopsy wouldn't prove a thing. They'd find Jacobs had a flock of morphine inside of him, but he was known to be a dopey anyway. I couldn't deny that I'd been right in the room with Mitch when when the shooting occurred outside. He'd slipped the needle itself into one of Jacobs's pockets, and there was nothing in his own room to give him away . . . Oh, it was a very artistic job."

"Um-m . . . Much too artistic," said Mulligan. He nodded to the two detectives. "Well, let's get going. You want to come down to the station house, Fisher, and be in on the askings?"

But Nick waved them away. "Murder's not in my line," he explained. "Besides, I've got to pack."

THE END.





MEN of

(by) STOOKIE

A BORN ADVENTURER

Major Merian C. Cooper has been hobnobbing with death for a score of years. His exploits as a fighting ace of two armies were notable, and he has risked his life a dozen times a day in filming jungle pictures.

COOPER, A SOUTHERNER, IS A DESCENDANT OF JOHN COOPER, COMMANDER OF A CAVALRY OUTFIT IN THE REVOLUTION. BORN IN JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA IN 1893, HE ENTERED ANNAPOLIS IN 1911. AS A CHAMPION WRESTLER AND DEVOTEE OF OTHER SPORTS HE WAS VERY POPULAR WITH THE CADETS. IN LONDON, ON A CRUISE, HE OVERSTAYED A LEAVE AND HAD TO RESIGN FROM THE ACADEMY. HE ENTERED THE MERCHANT MARINE AND SAILED THE SEVEN SEAS.

MAJOR MERIAN C. COOPER

AFTER ACTING AS A PHRENOLOGIST'S ASSISTANT, HE BECAME A REPORTER ON THE MINNEAPOLIS NEWS. LATER, COOPER DID A TRACTION SCANDAL YARN WITH SUCH TELLING EFFECT FOR ANOTHER WESTERN PAPER THAT HE WAS LET OUT. THE POLICE CHIEF TOLD HIM TO LEAVE TOWN FOR HIS OWN SAFETY. HE JOURNEYED DOWN TO TEXAS AND SAW SERVICE IN THE MEXICAN BORDER TROUBLE OF 1916.

This Feature Appears in ARGOSY Every Week

DARING

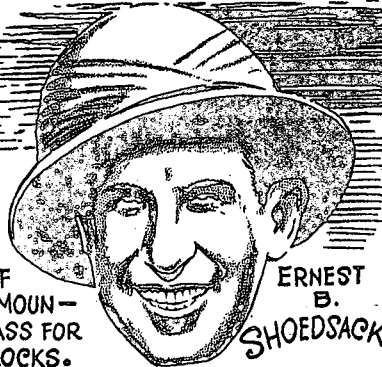
ALLEN  IN THE WORLD

WAR COOPER SERVED IN FRANCE WITH THE 20TH AIR SQUADRON. IN 1918 LT. COOPER WAS UP IN A BOMBER RETURNING UNDER ESCORT OF A LONE SPAD FROM AN AMMUNITION DUMP BOMBING. TWELVE FOKKERS ATTACKED HIM. HIS PLANE TOOK FIRE AND FELL, DESCRIBING A SMOKING CORKSCREW. AS IT NEARED THE EARTH HE SIDE-SLIPPED IT AND MADE A PANCAKE LANDING. TAKEN PRISONER, HE TALKED GERMAN SURGEONS OUT OF AMPUTATING HIS CHARRED ARMS.



AFTER THE WAR COOPER HELPED ORGANIZE THE KOSCIUSKO SQUADRON, TO FIGHT FOR THE POLES AGAINST THE BOLSHEVIKI. WHEN BUDENNY'S COSSACKS SWEEP TOWARD WARSAW, HE FLEW LOW OVER THE HORDE, SPRAYING THEM WITH MACHINE GUN BULLETS—BUT THEY SHOT HIM DOWN. HELD IN A VILE MOSCOW PRISON CAMP, MAJOR COOPER WAS DUE FOR THE FIRING SQUAD, BUT HE CONTRIVED A PERILOUS ESCAPE AFOOT TO POLAND.

WHILE ON A ROUND-THE-WORLD YACHT TRIP IN 1924 HE INDUCED ERNEST SHOEDSACK, A FORMER WAR PHOTOGRAPHER, TO JOIN HIM AS A MOTION PICTURE CAMERAMAN. THEY FILMED THE ANNUAL MIGRATION OF BAKTYARI TRIBESMEN OVER DANGEROUS PERSIAN MOUNTAINS IN SEARCH OF GRASS FOR THEIR FLOCKS.



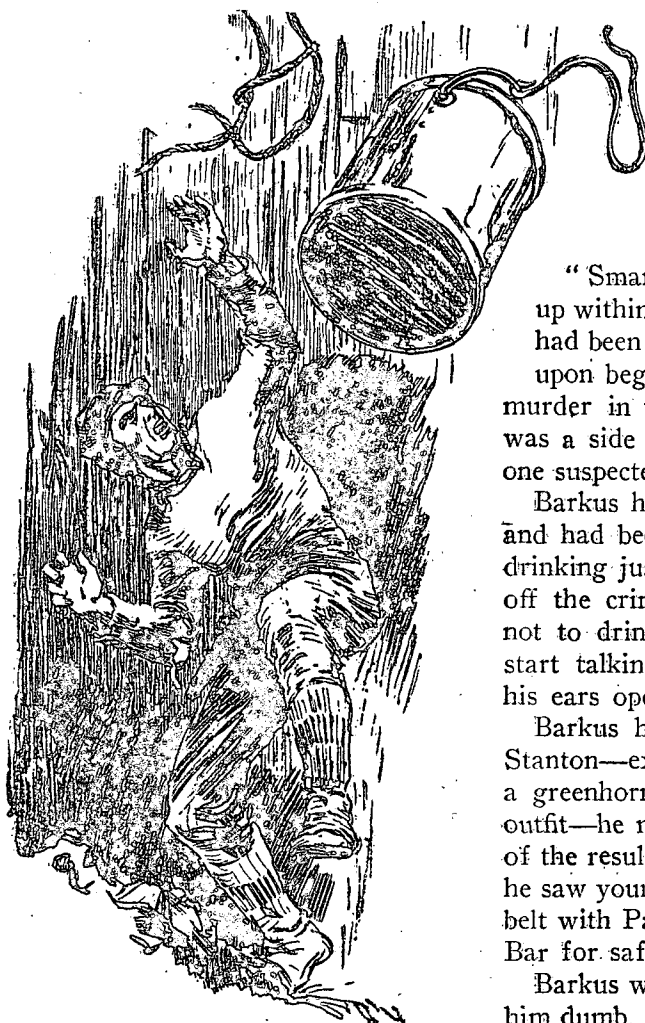
ON THE TRAIL OF NATURE'S THRILLS, IN 1926 THEY WENT DEEP INTO THE WORST TIGER COUNTRY OF SIAM. EXPLAINING THE SEQUENCE IN "CHANG" WHERE THE TIGERS APPEAR TO BOUND RIGHT AT THE CAMERA, COOPER SAID: "WE SHOT THE DANGEROUS SCENES FROM CAMOUFLAGED TRAPS IN THE GROUND, BUT HAD TO SHOOT SEVERAL TIGERS THAT GOT TOO CLOSE BEFORE WE GOT THE PICTURES WE WANTED." HE IS NOW A MOTION PICTURE EXECUTIVE.



Next Week: Allan J. Villiers; "Down to the Sea Under Sail"

Thread of Life

By CLIFF FARRELL



A piece of yarn and a bucket were the only weapons of a trapped man against his would-be murderer

"Smart" Barkus had him sized up within an hour as just the type he had been looking for. Barkus thereupon began planning Ken Stanton's murder in a fishy, offhand way that was a side of his character which no one suspected.

Barkus had already killed one man, and had been summering in Reelfoot, drinking just enough to keep his mind off the crime, and still being careful not to drink so much that he would start talking about it. He had kept his ears open, too.

Barkus had nothing against young Stanton—except perhaps that he was a greenhorn. But Barkus needed an outfit—he needed it to take advantage of the results of his other killing—and he saw young Stanton deposit a money belt with Pat Murphy in the Killarney Bar for safe keeping.

Barkus was aware that men thought him dumb. He was a warped, squatty individual with long arms that dangled loosely as he shambled with a tired forward slant. He had small, dull eyes, a sharp mouth—and the remainder of his face was lost in an inch-long mess of greasy whiskers that were never trimmed, and yet never seemed to increase their length.

They had tacked that nickname—Smart—on him because Barkus, in an

His partner was trying to kill him

KEN STANTON, wearing a gray wool sweater and socks that his mother had knitted for him on a farm back in Ohio, was as raw a chechacko as ever had hit Reelfoot on the Koyukuk, the day he landed on the last boat to run the river before the freeze-up.

attempt to offset general opinion, made it a point to boast of his brightness. "I'm too smart for 'em!" was one of his stock expressions.

Well, he had been too smart for them this time. They had never missed the man he had done in. The victim had been only another ripple in the human tide that had gone out of Reelfoot the previous winter—and like a ripple, his disappearance had not been noted. That was what Barkus had stayed in Reelfoot all through the dull summer to ascertain. He was safe now in cashing in on his crime.

So he waited another day, then bought a drink for Stanton in Murphy's place. The freeze-up was starting. The boom of drift ice came from the Koyukuk like a growling undertone to the buzz of conversation in the crowded bar, where men were impatiently awaiting the time for the jump-off into the gold country.

Barkus sized up Stanton again, and saw a sandy-haired, freckled, muscular young giant of about twenty-three years.

"Who yuh goin' in with?" Barkus asked indolently.

Stanton shook a discouraged head. "Haven't found a trail mate," he admitted. "They don't seem to care for greenhorns."

Barkus nodded. "This is a sourdough country, young feller." Then he dropped his voice. "Meet me outside."

BARKUS led Stanton to his shack—a chilly hovel that smelled like a dog kennel—and played his ace immediately by displaying his last three ounces of gold. A mere speck in the worn poke that Barkus opened, it caused Stanton's blue eyes to widen.

"There's more where it come

from," Barkus winked. "I struck it just before the break-up last spring, but I had ter leave an' come out. What do ye say?"

Stanton hesitated. He did not particularly cotton to Smart Barkus as a partner. He was revolted by the filth of the shack, and by the man's own appearance. There was something else about Barkus that Stanton could not make up his mind about—something deeper and more repelling. Yet gold was gold. Barkus was a sourdough and he knew the country. He had a definite prospect.

"Why do you pick me?" Stanton asked.

Barkus winked again. "Because I'm too smart fer 'em," he whispered. "They don't know I got it. They figger I'm a-workin' a day-wage bar som'eres, an' that don't int'rest 'um. They won't watch me, an' they won't give a damn what ye do—fer ye're a greenie. But if we mushed out ter-gether, some trail louse would git suspicious. But I'm too smart fer 'em! Up here, everybody watches everybody else.—But we won't go out ter-gether. We'll join up the river. How's that?"

Stanton looked at the gold again. "Sounds good," he finally said. "What will it be? Fifty-fifty."

Barkus summoned an injured expression. "Cert," he said. "Now, here's what ye'll need fer yer half of the outfit."

He began listing the pack investment that Stanton would make.

THUS it was that a week later they joined forces. The freeze-up had come, and their meeting point was twenty miles up the Koyukuk. Stanton had already camped, and Barkus came mushing in at dusk—with only a meager pack on his back.

Stanton said nothing about this, though he was surprised. He had invested his stake in a four-dog outfit, a tent, snowshoes, tools and rope. Now he realized that Barkus had led him a trifle astray on the fifty-fifty promise. Barkus was furnishing little but his own trail experience.

Various other things came to light before they reached the fork of the John River, with winter's heavy hand compressing the land into chilled steel. Barkus developed rheumatism whenever the going was heavy, thereby throwing the grueling work of breaking trail on the young redhead. Barkus also was in the habit of hunting ptarmigan and porcupine while Stanton made camp and got supper started. But Barkus never brought in a kill. As a marksman, his rating was zero.

One day Stanton clipped the head from a ptarmigan at sixty feet.

"Ye're a purty good shot, ain't you?" Barkus remarked.

"Came within an ace of making the international team at Camp Perry, two years ago," Stanton grinned.

That made Barkus thoughtful. Well, there were plenty of other ways of killing a man; one didn't have to risk a miss with a gun.

They reached the John, and veered for the heart of the Endicotts, mounting into a rugged white land, with the river the only highway. Barkus breathed easier now. There was little or no prospecting up the John. The main interest was centered to the east, in the Coldfoot district. Only twice, on the Koyukuk, had they encountered other mushers—and Barkus had been careful to make it clear that he and Stanton were only accidental companions for the day. That would avoid embarrassing questions when he came out alone in the spring.

Stanton had learned much in those hard days on the mush. His shoulders had hardened. This was work of the cruelest sort—but he liked it.

It was not the work that silenced him and thinned his grin. It was Barkus. The chechacko was wondering if gold really was worth the ordeal of enduring such a misfit for a partner.

Stanton was clean of mind and body. This might have been high adventure—the sparkling road to romance—but for Barkus.

Stanton believed that behind Barkus's thick brow and stolid face no thought into the future or a second in the past ever stirred. He was wrong! The thing that he had sensed at their first meeting, and which still came upon him occasionally, was the murder purpose that was never out of Barkus's mind. But Barkus intended to wait. He had need of Stanton's muscles for a time yet.

Eventually, they struck away from the John and up a nameless creek; and after three days of hard mushing in forty-below temperatures, Barkus exposed his sharp yellow teeth in one of his rare demonstrations of good humor.

"We'll be there, come ter-morrer, kid," he said. "Then we'll pick a likely spot, an' start workin'. I'm hopin'-we don't have ter go deep. Never kin tell, though."

Stanton smiled too. Perhaps the very toil of sinking a shaft would give him relief from Barkus's continual presence.

THE next morning they again turned off, this time into a "pup"—a tiny tributary to the creek. Barkus nearly missed it, for its mouth was a mere depression in the

shore, and it was choked with brush and snow.

They mounted it for three miles. Then Barkus for once willingly took the lead, though the going was heavy, necessitating the use of the big webs to pack it.

Finally Stanton, at the pole, heard Barkus shout from around a bend. Stanton shoved the dogs faster, rounded the elbow—and then bitter disappointment overwhelmed him. To come this far—to endure Barkus so long—for this! Before him was a flat where the high banks dropped away and leveled off, just as Barkus had pictured it. But they were too late. Someone had beaten them to it. A cabin, a snow-covered tailings dump, and the winter-bound skeleton of a windlass, and a boiler at the shaft mouth, stood in the flat.

Barkus was cursing. "Of all the sneezin' luck! Some joker's been workin' the claim all summer."

Stanton was too beaten to talk. They found the door of the shack open, and a drift of snow blocking it.

"S'funny," Barkus snarled. "Why the devil didn't he close 'er up tight? This'll be worse than siwashin'."

Barkus was being smart. He let Stanton make all the real discoveries.

Stanton made them rapidly. "Say!" he exclaimed. "That jigger must have pulled out in a terrible hurry. Here's his clothes, mouldy and rotting away.—And look! Flour and beans. His gun, too."

Barkus pretended indifference. The chechacko went outside, and finally climbed down the mouldy rope ladder into the shaft. A moment later his shout brought Barkus to the mouth of the diggings.

"Look!" Stanton said, lighting a match at the bottom.

Barkus pretended a horror he did not feel. "By hominy, kid!" he gasped. "The pore feller!—Dead!"

Stanton came up, pale and depressed.

Barkus looked around, and nodded sadly. "I savvy it now. He was workin' the shaft alone.—See! He had a trip hook tuh dump the bucket. But the rope broke, an' the bucket killed him. It's happened before."

Stanton searched about the shack, but found nothing to identify the victim. It was growing dark, so they camped near the creek. Neither felt like occupying the shack.

IN the morning, Barkus dug through the snow and chopped some frozen gravel from the tailings dump while Stanton silently prepared breakfast.

Now Barkus knew exactly what he would find as he washed the gravel in hot water beside the fire. He had tested this dump the previous spring. Barkus considered it a lucky day when, after a disastrous and fruitless quest farther up in the Endicotts, he had mushed down this pup on his way out. He had been surprised to stumble across this claim, for on his way up the previous fall, Barkus had passed this flat up as worthless.

Barkus had arrived in mid-morning, and the prospector was down in the shaft. With his usual stolid cunning, Barkus had not announced himself until he had tried a pan or two of the gravel that was being drawn up from the depths. That test had made a murderer of him.

The rest had been easy. He had merely ambushed himself beside the shaft until the prospector, knocking off for a noon snack, came climbing up the rope ladder. Barkus recalled the

swift flash of horror in the victim's face as he saw the club descending. He could hear again the thud of the body as it struck the bottom. Then Barkus had pounded the hoisting cable apart, and dropped the iron bucket down on the slain man. It was an airtight case of death by accident—due to the broken cable.

Now Barkus simulated intense excitement as he reduced the gravel to a thin film of black sand. The sand was flecked with gold.

"Stanton!" he cried. "We're rich!"

The chechacko looked at the pan and drew a deep breath. "But it's not ours," he finally said slowly. "That poor guy must have relatives somewhere."

Barkus was astounded. "He didn't stake it," he cried. "Ye're not really meanin' that ye're softie enough ter pass up a fortune. Yer a bigger fool than—"

"Stow it!" Stanton said curtly. "Do you think I'm a thief?"

Barkus saw that he would have to take another course. "Mebbe ye're right, kjd," he mumbled. "But ye're forgittin' that I was on the ground first. How 'bout workin' it an' goin' halves with 'em—if we find any heirs?"

Stanton shook his head.

"Somebody else might stumble across it an' grab the whole thing," Barkus argued desperately. "It ain't staked, I tell ye."

There was some logic in that. "I'll think it over," Stanton said. "Let's get him out of the shaft and bury him. Perhaps we can identify him."

THEY had plenty of cable and rope to replace the hoisting length and the ladder, which was of doubtful strength. After an hour they were ready, and Barkus descend-

ed into the shaft. Soon he gave the signal, and Stanton worked the windlass. The body of the victim appeared on the surface. Time had worked considerable havoc, but when Barkus came up, he declared he had made identification.

"That's pore Pete Ainsley from Port Yukon," he stated. "Me an' him prospected outta Forty Mile in the old days."

"Any family?"

Barkus shook a doleful head. "Pete tole me he didn't have a soul in the world."

Stanton reserved judgment. He believed Barkus would have lied in any event.

They thawed a grave, and buried the prospector.

"Wal, what d'ya say?" Barkus asked when that task was ended. "We got a better right ter this claim than any duck in the world. Why, ol' Pete would rather I get it than anybody."

"I'd prefer to try some new ground," Stanton argued.

Barkus flew into a rage. "Ye'vealy sap!" he snarled. "Gold's where ye find it. We kin sink shafts in this blasted country till we die of old age—an' maybe never hit color. This here is a placer. It's plenty rich—too rich ter last. It probably could be cleaned out in one season. An' if we don't do it someone else will."

Stanton looked at the pan, now frozen, where the gold glistened among the black sand. It would be worth while, even if the lion's share went to others.

"All right," he finally agreed. "But only on condition that we hunt any rightful heirs and give them their decent share. He may have relatives who need it."

They began. The boiler and steam

points were in fair condition, and that made the work easier. They reached bed rock within a week, and the gravel was rich in gold.

Stanton privately called it Dead Man's Claim, but Barkus had no such notions. Now that he had won Stanton over, he was cheerful—even ambitious. But that eventually passed. Even the fact that each day saw the gravel mound increased by so much potential wealth, failed to inspire Barkus after a month of it, and little by little he began to ease the main burden of the labor onto the young redhead.

One day, Stanton, toiling in the drift at forty-five feet, found the steam failing. He mounted, and located Barkus dozing beside the stove in the shaft. The fuel for the boiler was exhausted—the fire dying.

Two months' accumulation of resentment boiled in Stanton then, and he picked Barkus up by the collar and shook him.

Barkus, frothing venomous curses, tried to reach his rifle, but Stanton seized the gun, kicked Barkus out into the snow, and then ejected all the shells and appropriated all the ammunition in the shack.

"From now on, you do your half of the work," he told Barkus grimly.

"Gimme thet gun!" Barkus snarled.

For answer, Stanton booted him toward the shaft.

But Stanton had read the murder flare in Barkus's eyes. From then on, he wore his six-shooter, even when he was in the shaft; and he cached all the ammunition far away in the ridges.

SPRING came, and softened the land. They turned the steam points on the gravel, and began washing it through a long-tom.

They were now racing to beat the breakup. They had the cream of the pay dirt now; for two weeks the pan had showed only meager colors.

Finally the job was finished.

They sat looking at each other across the table in the shack, pokes containing more than four thousand ounces of gold between them.

"Still figgerin' on lookin' for someone ter give it to?" Barkus sneered.

Stanton nodded. "But in any event, we'll keep our fair share. We earned it."

Barkus's eyes did not rise from the table. The time to strike had come. He had already delayed over long.

"We better mush in the mornin'," he mumbled. "If the John breaks before we get down, we'll have a hell of a time."

Stanton did not sleep that night. The old impression that Barkus had something deep in his mind was once more upon the redhead in full force. But Barkus did not stir from his bunk during the night.

"Better take the rope an' cable with us," Barkus proposed the next morning.

The sled was loaded, and the dogs were helping their impatience to hit the trail.

Stanton agreed, and swung down the shaft to release the ladder from its moorings at the bottom. Barkus began fumbling with the hoisting cable.

The heavy iron bucket—the same that Stanton believed to have killed Pete Ainsley, was sitting on the edge of the shaft's mouth—still attached to the hoisting cable. This cable, in turn, was wound about the windlass spool.

Stanton freed the ladder at the bottom and was reaching for a rung to ascend when it was jerked upward, out of his hands.

He looked up, and saw Barkus's face briefly. Then it vanished. Something else partially blotted out the light, and Stanton dove headlong into the drift just in time to escape the heavy gravel bucket which struck with a smash, bounded a foot into the air and fell back in the bottom of the shaft.

Following it came the swishing coils of the released cable. With a final *plop!* the end came down. The hoisting cable had been cut! The rope ladder was gone!

Stanton peered out and up. Far above—only forty-five feet, but it seemed an infinity—was a tiny circle of daylight, bisected by the spool of the windlass. How remote, how precious that glimpse of sky seemed to the redhead!

Like a hammer-blow, unnerving terror struck Stanton. The gloom of his chill prison, together with a million horrible thoughts, crushed upon him as the weight of sea depths squeezes a diver bereft of his air pressure.

The ladder, and the cable—his only threads to life—were gone. He had been a fool. He had allowed himself to be lulled into security. Barkus had got him after all.

Stanton shouted hoarsely, but there was no response. Then he heard the dogs. Their yelps grew fainter, and at last lapsed into silence.

Barkus had left him here to die—just as he had left Pete Ainsley. As if in sudden revelation, Ken Stanton now knew that Barkus had killed Ainsley also.

STANTON tried the shaft wall first with his fingers and then with his knife. It was hopeless. At this depth the walls were frozen like flint.

He picked up the cable end. It had been cut. Barkus had been smart. No one knew that they had prospected together, and even if Stanton's body was found, it would look like an accident. The disappearance of the rope ladder would arouse suspicion if anyone even bothered to consider that angle.

Barkus undoubtedly would destroy the dogs and sled upon reaching the John, and pack down to Reelfoot, probably caching most of the gold until he could safely smuggle it out of Alaska.

Stanton drew his gun and eyed it. Well, he had one means of avoiding starvation—a better and quicker way of wooing death.

The picture of his mother rose before him. She would be knitting in the bay window of the living room, overlooking the calm Muskingum.

He fingered his gray, knitted sweater, for he had not donned his parka. His toil-hardened fingers trembled. The sweater was worn now, after all these months of labor, its elbows ragged and torn. Stitch by stitch his mother had made the sweater—and the socks too.

Suddenly Stanton sat down and began to pull off one of his packs—a desperate hope in his face. Next he stripped off the sock. Toes and heels of the sock were also worn through. But the knee-length leg was intact.

In the gloom of the shaft, he probed among the weave for long, breathless minutes. Finally he gave a sigh. The sock began to unravel.

AN hour later, Stanton was ready. He had carried the cable and bucket into the drift, and cleared the shaft bottom of every loose pebble or obstructing lump. A coil of gray yarn lay in a spiral on the floor:

Stanton stood, pointing his revolver up the shaft, aiming with every nerve taut. He had managed to remove a tiny bolt from the cable clamp on the gravel bucket. The bolt was sitting in the end of the gun now, one end of the coiled yarn tied to it. Stanton had pried the bullets from the shells in the gun, and wadded the shells with clay.

Slowly he squeezed the trigger. *Bang!* The bolt was hurled up—up—up. It cleared the top of the windlass—and then disappeared beyond the rim of the shaft.

Stanton gave a heartsick groan of despair. The violence of the explosion had snapped the yarn instantly. He sat down, weak from the reaction. But soon he rose, and inspected the gravel bucket again. He could find no more loose bolts. But the bucket's fall had sprung some rivets. He found a broken pick, and managed to force a small rivet free. This time he quadrupled the yarn for the first twenty feet, where the strain was greatest.

Once more he aimed. *Bang!* The rivet sailed upward; the coil of yarn unreeled smoothly. It had not broken.

Stanton, his fist squeezing the gun, watched the rivet as it seemed to pause, lazily. Then it ticked the windlass—and fell dismally back down at his feet. It had been so close—and yet so far.

Once more. The rivet landed outside the shaft this time, but he managed to drag it back without breaking the yarn.

A fourth try, with the same result. Stanton drew his sleeve across his forehead. Only two more shells. He coiled the yarn again; then stood for throbbing seconds steadying his arm.

Bang! The rivet ascended, seemed to hang with tantalizing deliberation as a vague speck in the sunlight. He

could hear the swish of the yarn as it played out.

Then—Stanton gave a sob. The rivet struck the spool lightly—trembled, seemed to hang there for an age—and began dropping down.

He gave a cry of misery, but it quickly changed to a shout of hope. *The yarn was still playing out!* The rivet had fallen across the windlass spool. At last he had a link with the surface—a mere spidery strand of wool it was true—a veritable thread of life.

He lowered the rivet within reach. The yarn now made a double strand that hung from the windlass.

Stanton pulled off his sweater and began seeking the key to its intricate weave. Eventually he found it, and began unraveling it. His throat tightened as the revelation of the infinite toil that had gone into its manufacture was revealed to him. Why, there seemed miles of the strand; and it had been woven stitch by stitch, bit by bit, by loving, patient hands.

He measured it into thirty-yard lengths, by the chin and arm method. Eventually he had a woven string of ten strands of wool. Then, removing his other sock, he added two more strands to it. The wool was heavy and fairly strong, but some of its fibers were worn; these he did his best to discard. Finally he tested it, and was somewhat heartened.

He drew it over the windlass by means of the single strand. Now he had strengthened his hold on life by more than ten-fold.

BUT life was not his yet. He lifted the hoisting cable—and was dismayed. It was dishearteningly heavy; fifty or sixty pounds. He measured it carefully, and cut its

length to a bare forty-five feet, in order to lighten it.

Then he tied it to the braided yarn, and began drawing it up. There was no danger until thirty feet of its weight had lifted up the shaft. Then Stanton began to sweat, coldly and sickly, for he could feel the strain on the yarn.

Inch by inch he pulled, praying. The cable end touched the spool.

Then came an agony. The end of the cable refused to slip easily over the spool! Stanton dared not try to force it over, for the least extra pressure on the wool would snap it. He tried again and again.

Then, with Stanton shaking from nerve exhaustion, magically it slipped over. Next came the problem of securing one end to the spool forty-five feet above.

The bail on the ore bucket was removable, being set into sockets into which the heavy strap-iron hooks of the bail were introduced by means of trap slits in the bucket sides. But the bail weighed another ten pounds. Would the wool strand hold? Stanton first managed to bend the bail into a more acute hook, then attached it to the cable. He next tied the loose end of the wool strand to the bail.

He eased the bail as high as he could reach, and drew the upper end of the cable down toward him. Soon the weight of the descending cable offset the added weight of the bail, and Stanton breathed easier. But accordingly, the strain again started on the yarn when the cable's weight began to drag on the up-going end. But the yarn continued to hold.

Then came the final gamble—the most desperate of all. If the hook did not catch, if it slipped on over the

spool, the yarn would be snapped and the whole contrivance would fall back into the shaft. His thread of life would be broken.

Stanton jerked the cable, and the hook grated on the spool, trembled, swung from side to side—and then clung there, precariously.

Stanton held the cable taut, for the least slackness might free the bail. He managed to tie his gun to the cable end—and then he swung himself up, hand over hand. Then his bleeding hands grasped the framework of the windlass, and he dragged himself over the edge and lay like a dead man.

Finally he arose and stretched his arms upward in thankfulness. It was late afternoon. He had been fighting for his life the whole day. Stanton brought up the cable, the yarn, and his gun. The yarn he coiled and pocketed. He also coiled the cable and shouldered it. It was heavy—but it and the yarn would be evidence. Then he started on Smart Barkus's trail.

THREE weeks later, grim-faced men emerged from Pat Murphy's saloon in Reelfoot. A miners' meeting had just ended. Two of the group were half-carrying a sobbing wretch who knew that it was useless to plead for his life. Another miner was tying the traditional two folds and thirteen knots of a hangman's hondo.

They gathered under a tree. As the noose was put into place, the afternoon sun caught a wisp of gray on the cable. The rope was the very hoisting cable that had lifted Ken Stanton to safety—and the bit of gray yarn was still tied to it. Smart Barkus never knew how Ken Stanton had escaped from the shaft.

THE END.

The Golden City

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

Author of "The Radio War," "The Radio Pirates," etc.

It was Adams Mayhew against a mad genius—with the existence of a lost Pacific continent at stake



Chaos pursued them as they ran

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

ADAMS MAYHEW, American sailor, is in one of the queerest situations any man ever faced. His predicament began when he was lost overboard from the whaling barque Alaska as it was lying becalmed in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. When he came to the surface after plunging into the sea, his ship was no longer visible.

Instead, near at hand was the shore of a city of Oriental splendor. Hauled out of the water by the inhabitants of this Golden City, he soon became one of them, learned their language and made

friends—and an enemy. His best friend is Julo, a magistrate of the city, who takes him into his home. He meets Marta, Julo's wife; Porto, a young man who resembles himself very much in appearance; Eleria, the girl with whom Porto is in love, and with whom Mayhew falls in love, and Tirio, centurion of police and Porto's avowed enemy.

Despite the splendor and happiness of this strange city, and of the continent of Mu upon which it is located, it is menaced by a misshapen and diabolically clever dwarf who calls himself the Spider. The Spider has his underground throne in the volcano, Pele, which his followers worship, and he is determined to gain control of the continent.

Mayhew, gaining his confidence and admission to his realm, learns of the Spider's occult powers, which enable him to send his assassins to any place he wishes, merely by having them step through a screen of smoke. Tirio, who also has many followers, joins forces with the Spider. Mayhew, before escaping from the caverns, learns the purpose of the canals that the Spider is having dug from the sea to the interior of Pele. If the Muians do not accede to his demands, he will let the sea pour into the volcano, causing an explosion that will devastate the earth.

Having learned this, Mayhew hastens back to the Golden City.

This story began in the Argosy for May 13.

CHAPTER XX (*Continued*).

TO SAVE THE WORLD.

"DON'T you know me?" Mayhew asked the men who faced him, for both of them were servants whom he recognized.

"The house of Julo in these days is not open to strangers," replied one of the blacks.

Well, at least it was the house of Julo!

"Is Julo well, and his gracious wife Marta?" Mayhew asked.

"Both are well," the Negro replied, "but strangers are not permitted to enter. Who are you, and what is your errand? Look, he wears an iron belt instead of one of gold! He is a spider-man!"

At this announcement both servants raised their scimitars. Mayhew drew his sword and fell back a pace.

Calling them both by name he exclaimed, "I am Adams Mayhew! I captured this belt in a fight with spider-men. But no more of this foolishness! Send for Julo, and let him identify me!"

"Will you hand over your sword and submit to search?" asked one of the Negroes, still incredulous.

For reply Mayhew flung his broadsword at their feet and held his arms aloft, so that they were soon satisfied that, even though he might not be the missing Adamo Mayho, he was at least completely unarmed and harmless. They led him within and sent for their master.

Julo came with his usual stately tread; but as soon as he set eyes upon Mayhew he rushed forward, flung his arms around his neck, and sobbed, "My son! My son! You have returned to me."

Mayhew was much touched, and not

a little embarrassed. To relieve his confusion he announced, "I have important information for the government."

"Important though it may be," replied the kindly Julo, "I refuse to listen to a word of it until you have bathed and shaved and changed and rested.—But you had better keep that square-cut beard. It will come in handy, if you ever have to return again to the caves of Pele."

Mayhew shuddered. The caves of Pele! Was he not yet through with the gruesome Spider?

Then he was led away to the showers and swimming pool. Finally, bathed and shaved, and dressed in a clean toga, he returned to the reception hall, to find that quite a group of people had gathered there in his absence. But, of them all, he saw only one. Eleria! Eleria of the blue eyes, honey-colored hair, and cameo features.

At the sight of her he sprang forward and held out his arms; but she shyly and sadly shook her yellow head and held out her hand to him. And then he noticed that Porto was standing beside her. Somehow he had forgotten Porto.

But, after all, Porto was his friend; and Porto hadn't won Eleria from him—yet. So he greeted them both, and then turned and greeted Marta. He acknowledged the salutations and congratulations of the rest of the group, men of high government position who had been active in organizing the recent expedition against the Spider.

Rapidly the developments of the past two days were sketched for the benefit of the newcomer.

It seemed that the Spider had again placarded the city with notices, this time announcing that he was now ready to destroy the world, but that he was

willing to hold off for a little while longer in order to give the world a chance to arrange with him the terms of its surrender to him. If Mu, instead of parleying, should choose to fight, he would still withhold the final stroke so long as his own forces were victorious.

But if—which Pele forbid—the forces of Mu should triumph, then most assuredly the Spider would destroy the world.

Of course, no one believed that the Spider, for all his uncanny powers, could destroy the world, or even any appreciable part of the continent of Mu; but when Mayhew, cutting in on their narrative, explained the Spider's diabolical plan for flooding the eternal fires with sea-water, the crowd sobered.

Several scientists present admitted that the scheme held dire possibilities.

Then the narrative continued. Inasmuch as the authorities now knew, from information given them by Mayhew, the exact location of many of the spots which the menacing alchemist was wont to visualize in his crystal gazing-globe; they had watched and guarded those spots; and, as a result, had actually waylaid and killed many of the emissaries who had been sent through the worluk screen to post notices.

Now these places were barricaded off and guarded, and no one was permitted to go to them. This accounted for the condition in which Mayhew had found his old home upon his return.

He now checked over their list, and added several more places, including the river bank by the village of Forbosa and the gnarled willow tree on the mountainside.

Other cities throughout the empire

were reported to be taking the same precautions, and a huge army was being recruited to march against the caves at the earliest possible moment.

THE next few weeks sped very quickly. There still were assassinations; but one by one the Spider's worluk-spots were located and were closed to him, until finally the only way in which he could distribute proclamations was to throw them through the smoke-haze into the proscribed spots; any one of his minions who ventured through would have been instantly killed.

Mayhew was kept very busy, chiefly in checking up information about the Spider. But he managed to see quite a lot of Eleria; who, however, distributed her favors quite impartially between him and his friend and double, Porto.

Porto wasn't quite his double these days, for Porto was clean-shaven, whereas Adams Mayhew still wore his Egyptian beard, which he abominated, as preparation for a possible return to the caves.

At last the expedition, fully organized, set out. Similar forces were converging upon the mountains of Pele from every other city of the continent.

And when the advance up the actual slopes of the mountain began, great care was taken to avoid known menaces. The men advanced in widely spaced skirmish lines, so that wherever lava and gas were poured forth suddenly upon them, only a few were killed. Remembering the sad fate of the other expedition, valleys were avoided. Cliffs from which rocks might be hurled were flanked.

Occasionally an advance party would be attacked from the rear by yellow

men appearing miraculously from nowhere. But, whenever this happened, the far-flung communication lines of the Muians located the worluk-spot, and thereafter it was guarded night and day, and thus rendered impotent.

It was slow work, fighting inch by inch almost, up the barren mountain-sides, but the steady advance continued, until one day a soldier guarding one of the worluk-spots brought to headquarters a paper which he had found clutched in the hand of an enemy spearman who had suddenly materialized before him, and had been killed by him. It bore the repulsive Spider-crest, and was very brief. It said, "You win. And now I destroy the earth."

Somehow, in their intentness on their steady advance, every one had forgotten the threat that victory meant destruction.

A hurried council was held, in the midst of which a steady drone in the sky began and became louder and louder as it approached. It was one of the huge mechanical dragon-flies of the priesthood of Ra.

All conversation ceased, for these airships, although well known, were seldom seen, and the uncanny thought of man being able to fly always filled the bystanders with awe and dread of the supernatural.

The machine in question landed near the group, and Grand High Priest Alvo alighted from it and joined them. He had come to bless their cause.

And suddenly the arrival of the venerable prelate gave Adams Mayhew an idea.

"How many men will that flying machine hold?" he asked.

"Six, besides the driver," was the reply.

"Could it land in the mountains?"
"It can land anywhere."

QUICKLY he sketched his plan. It was to pick out the five best swordsmen in the expeditionary forces, and then fly them and Mayhew to the mouth of the shaft which led down into the heart of the mountains. Mayhew could direct them through the tunnels, while the flying machine flew back and forth bringing more and yet more reinforcements. Perhaps in this way they could reach the dam which held back the tides of ocean from the eternal fires of Pele, before the Spider caused this dam to be blasted away.

Alvo assented and the first squad was gathered, and hastily clambered into the silver body of the huge dragon-fly. Brave men though they were, their faces paled as, with a deafening roar, the thing left the ground.

To Mayhew the actual fact that he was flying probably seemed more truly remarkable than to the native Muians, but he did not have their superstitious dread of it. To them it represented the work of supernatural and uncanny forces controlled by the priesthood, and was on a par with the worluk of the Spider.

Accordingly Mayhew was the first to recover from that sinking feeling in the pit of the stomach which the departure from the ground had given them. He glanced over the side at the sun-kissed fields, and noted that they seemed to be a blue-green, rather than the customary yellow-green when viewed from the ground. The houses seemed garishly painted blocks of wood. The rivers and ponds were black, instead of silver-blue. The whole scene below reminded him of a toy village which he had once owned as a child, with tinted excelsior for grass.

And when the flying machine bent to the wind—or so Mayhew from his nautical experience conceived it—the toy landscapes below seemed to tip and slide up to one side, while the ship of the air kept an even keel.

In a minute or two they were over the foothills and nosing sharply up toward the heights. Mayhew seized a speaking tube—he knew what they were, for he had seen them running from bridge to engine room on steamboats—and directed the navigator of the flying machine toward the opening of the shaft which was their destination.

But as he drew near it he was surprised to see a crowd of several hundred spider-men congregated there. This introduced a complication. Perhaps the Spider, through his uncanny spy system, had already learned of their venture, and had laid his plans to anticipate them.

If so, however, his plans were vain; for as the flying machine swooped down, these minions of the enemy scattered in every direction, and scuttled off over the rocks in very evident abject terror.

The space around the shaft was now practically deserted. Not completely deserted, however; for there, on a wooden replica of the red-marble skull-topped throne of the caves below, sat the Spider, squat and hunched and repulsive, croaking out orders which were not even being heard, much less obeyed.

THE airship landed and Adams Mayhew stepped out. The five soldiers were still much too mentally and spiritually shaken to accompany him; but the Spider was alone, unarmed and unguarded.

Mayhew strode over to the throne.

"Your excellency," he shouted, "at last we have you at our mercy. Quick, countermand your order to destroy the world. If not, I shall have to kill you."

A crafty grin spread over the hook-nosed face.

"And how can I send the order, Adamo Mayho," the creature croaked, "since you have scattered all my faithless followers?"

"Give me your signet ring as a token," the American replied, "and I will take your message."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then I shall have to kill you, take the ring by force, and compose my own message."

"Mayho," said the Spider fiercely, with snapping eyes, "you forget that I am invulnerable."

"And you forget that you yourself once told me that the secret of your invulnerability lies only in a certain shirt which you wear beneath your black jersey jacket. But come! No more temporizing! Give me the ring and the message!"

Mayhew began to draw his sword. But he never finished.

The creature's left hand suddenly gripped the arm of the throne, his body stiffened, and his right arm with fingers extended shot out toward Adams Mayhew. A surge of disembodied force seemed to strike the young man squarely on the chest, staggering him backward a pace and paralyzing his will.

"I am still master here," hissed the Spider triumphantly. "And now you will do as I command."

"Yes, master," said Mayhew's voice, in a singsong sleep-walking tone. He did not consciously say the words; in fact he strove to hold them back; but they came out in spite of him.

"Good!" ejaculated the Spider, a

crooked smile playing across his thin lips. "And now," he exulted, "at last I have the ship of the air, for which I tried to bargain with the Grand High Priest. With it I can fly to safety."

By this time the five soldiers and the pilot had gotten out of the flying machine and were approaching the throne.

But Mayhew suddenly found a stronger will than his own speaking through his mouth, "You five soldiers hurry down into that shaft, where you will await me at the bottom. This is a situation which I prefer to handle by myself. And you, navigator, come over here."

With some grumbling and uncertainty the soldiers departed for the shaft and the pilot approached the throne.

Out shot the Spider's other hand, and he held two men by his will, instead of one.

Mayhew's brain raced madly, thinking clearly in a detached sort of way, but totally unable to control either his speech or his actions. If only another of the Spider's epileptic fits would come on. But no such luck. That had saved him once. Too much of a coincidence to expect that it would save him again.

The Spider was speaking to the pilot, "Draw your sword and kill Adamo Mayho. Then pick me up and carry me to your ship. It is my will."

The bemused pilot started to draw.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SPIDER DIES.

AS the Muian aviator raised his sword under the influence of the mesmeric powers of that deformed paralytic, Mayhew was power-

less to move or to protect himself. The Spider's evil eyes gleamed with revenge. But he had been too eager for his vengeance; he should have waited just a few minutes more.

For the five soldiers had not quite yet reached the shaft-mouth, and one of them happened to glance back. And then things began to happen. This soldier was a skillful swordsman, and a knife thrower as well, and in an instant his keen blade was hurtling through the air, straight at the luckless pilot.

But the Spider too saw the weapon coming, and exerted his will to cause the pilot to step to one side. The sword missed its mark by a hairbreadth and went clattering off down the rocks. However, the side-stepping of the pilot saved Mayhew from his blow; and before the Spider could will the man back again to the attack the five soldiers were upon him.

Swiftly moved the hypnotically fluttering fingers as the evil creature swept them all into his power. The unfortunate pilot had been killed in the onslaught, but in his place the Spider now had five new automatons to do his bidding.

However, in all the excitement and flurry and difficulty of directing his will upon five different men at once, the Spider must have forgotten to keep Adams Mayhew under control. At all events, the young American suddenly felt his own tremendous efforts for freedom bear fruit.

With a gasp he wrenched his feet free from the spell which bound them. Then drew his sword and drove it into the throat of the menace of Mu.

As the creature died, its eyes turned pitifully toward its slayer, the man whom it once had trusted and befriended; and Mayhew felt a momentary pang of disloyalty. Then he

remembered the crimes of which the Spider had been guilty, and the even grosser crimes which the Spider had contemplated; and his pity and self-condemnation were changed to wild exultation.

There still was time to save the world!

Snatching off the signet ring of the dying Spider, Mayhew shouted to the five soldiers, now out of their trance again, to bring torches from the plane. Then the six of them rushed toward the opening of the caves. Their entrance was unopposed.

As they rushed through the dark corridors, with their flaring torches held aloft, the thought kept echoing in Mayhew's ears, "There still is time! There still is time!"

At last they reached the spot where the excavations of the Spider had left only one thin wall of rock between the waters of ocean and the fires of Pele. A squad of workers, led by an overseer, were just hurrying away from the scene. Mayhew rushed up to them.

Holding out the hand which bore the signet ring of the Spider, he shouted, "By the orders of his excellency, the explosion must stop."

"Back! Back!" replied the foreman. "It is too late."

With a frightful roar in that confined space, the retaining wall crumpled. The overseer and his squad dashed by, and Mayhew and his four men turned and followed. Pele and Ocean had been joined!

BEHIND them could be heard a deafening hissing. The whole cave filled with steam. And then an ever growing chaos of explosions began to occur behind them, increasing in frequency and intensity. The ground shook beneath their feet as

they ran. The walls heaved and buckled. Pieces of ceiling fell.

The crescendo of explosions by now had merged into one continuous roar, like that of a tropical thunderstorm. Crevasses opened, which they had to jump.

And then with a showering avalanche of rock the entire passageway collapsed in front of them, completely barring the way. They were trapped in the crumbling caves of Pele!

Like madmen, Mayhew's five companions flung themselves frantically against the barrier.

But he shouted to them above the din, "Come on back! There must be other ways out of this mountain. Keep your heads, men. We're not whipped until we're dead. Come on! Let's find a way."

So back they rushed again. Back toward the turmoil which was causing all this disaster.

They met a group of fleeing, terror-crazed spider-men. Mayhew stopped these newcomers, exhibited his signet of authority, calmed them; and informed them that the tunnel was barred.

"Tolofo," said one of the yellow men, "I know a detour back to the throne room. From there, there are other little-used passages leading to the surface."

"Lead on!" commanded the supposed Tolofo.

Upon arriving at the throne room they found it and the surrounding caves literally packed with struggling, jostling, yellow humanity. And, in their midst, the centurion Tirio, vainly striving to calm them and learn some way of escape out of that crumbling roaring chaos.

As Adams Mayhew strode into the throne room at the head of his little

group, Tirio shouted, "Seize him! Seize the impostor, in the name of his excellency!"

But Mayhew held up the signet ring and replied, "What right have you to speak for his excellency? Behold the seal of your master! I am in command here. Ho, men, seize and bind the centurion!"

But one of the five Muian soldiers who had accompanied Mayhew had no more sense than to add, "Anyway, the Spider is dead."

A hush fell over the jostling throng.

"In which case," shouted Tirio, "you stole the ring."

The sullen spider-men glanced from one to the other of the two men who claimed their leadership. It was a toss-up as to which the fickle mob would throw its support.

But, before they could decide, Mayhew held up his hand and said, "A truce, O Tirio. All ways out must be barred, or you and this throng would not still be here. The mountain is cracking and trembling. I alone can save us."

"How?" sneered Tirio.

"By worluk. Let me mount the throne, and I will get you all out of here. Not only out of here, but far from this mountain and its menace."

"Agreed!" shouted the centurion, clapping his hands in command. "Quick! Bring worluk powder!"

It was pure bluff on Mayhew's part; for, although under the tutoring of the evil alchemist he had mastered the art of crystal gazing, he never yet had made worluk.

NEVERTHELESS, with an assumed air of confidence, he ascended the skull-topped blood-red throne and concentrated his gaze on the little globe of glass.

"What do you see?" anxiously asked Tirio, taking up a position beside the throne.

"The public square of the Golden City," Mayhew replied, "roped off and heavily guarded."

"I can send my troops through and overwhelm them."

"You won't be given the chance," Mayhew coolly replied. "I'm the Spider now, and there's not going to be any more fighting."

He swept the vision away with a wave of his hand, and concentrated again.

"Ah, that is better," said he. "The courtyard of Julo's house, and only a small guard. I'll send some white men through first, to explain the situation to them."

By this time the bowl of worluk powder had been brought and lighted. Mayhew waved his hand imperiously; and to his own intense surprise, the ascending smoke promptly took on a globular form.

The room heaved and shook, the torches quivered and smoked, and the din of volcanic explosions and splintering rock had by now become almost deafening. Yet, by a supreme effort of his will, Mayhew held steady the ball of worluk smoke. It cleared, and Julo's courtyard could be seen by all. The throng rushed toward it.

"Back!" shouted Mayhew above the din. "Any one who attempts to penetrate the smoke screen without my permission will vanish."

The superstitious yellow men promptly edged away.

"Now," he commanded, "you five Muian soldiers go through, and explain the truce."

With blanched faces they obeyed. They could be seen talking with the guards, then staring back with unsee-

ing bewilderment. Mayhew ordered a yellow spearman through, and saw the man enter the courtyard unmolested.

"Your turn, Tirio," he announced.

The centurion clenched his fists and steeled himself to step through into safety. Then, in single rank, the survivors of the forces of the Spider poured into the ball of smoke.

The ceiling of the throne room began to disintegrate. The heat became oppressive, the air so sulphurous that Mayhew could hardly breathe.

A hissing, sizzling sound could be heard on his left. Mayhew did not turn his gaze from the globe of smoke before him, but out of the corner of his eye he could see the front edge of a sluggish river of lava enter through one of the doorways and slowly approach the throne.

Only a handful of yellow men remained. And then Mayhew suddenly remembered something which the Spider had once told him: "And even if I were not a cripple, I could not hold the ball of worluk smoke intact while I myself passed through it."

Mayhew had saved the others by means of his Spider-taught mystic powers. He himself was trapped in the caves of Pele!

The last yellow man passed through. Mayhew leaned back on the throne, relaxed slightly, and sighed. Then the wall behind him collapsed, hurling him forward onto the floor and into the fast-vanishing worluk sphere.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHAOS!

WHEN MAYHEW came to his senses again he lay securely bound on the stone flagging of Julo's courtyard. The ground

trembled slightly from distant earthquake shocks. Above him stood Tirio, leering down at him.

"Thank you for getting me out of the caves of Pele," said the rat-faced centurion. "And it may interest you to know that you've enabled me to do what I always tried to persuade the Spider to attempt—attack the Muians from the rear by means of worluk. I am now the master of the Golden City."

Mayhew groaned.

"Fool!" he said. "Mu is being racked to pieces by volcanic upheavals, yet you still prate of war and mastery. I thought that we had declared a truce."

"The truce is off," Tirio succinctly announced, as he turned on his heel and left the courtyard.

Under heavy guard Mayhew was placed in one of the bedrooms of the house which faced toward the west, toward the mountain of Pele, smoking ominously in the distance. The mountain and the land around it seemed to tremble and heave.

Then, as Mayhew gazed, there burst forth in the midst of this scene a tiny flame, which spread and grew and mounted, until it became a mighty roaring pillar of fire, several miles in diameter, and rising to the clouds.

These clouds changed to black smoke, which overshadowed the entire land and became shot with many lightnings, blending strangely with the red glare of the pillar of fire. Then from the northward a tidal wave rushed in across the intervening space. The house began to rock and shake.

The setting sun appeared beneath the pall of smoke and lingered upon the horizon like a ball of fire, red and angry looking. And well might he be angry at the devastation which Pele,

the bride whom he had scorned, was wreaking upon his beloved land.

For a while the sun-god lingered to watch the holocaust which he was powerless to avert; then, as though with a shrug of resignation, he sank beneath the waves. Deep dark night, lit by the hell-fires of Pele and the silver flashes of lightning, settled over land and sea.

During the night most of what was left of Mu was torn asunder and rent to pieces. The central pillar of fire died down, its force spent; but in all directions could be seen and heard the flash and roar of many a relatively small explosion, each destroying forever a section of the land.

Down, down sank the continent of Mu into the eternal fires of Pele; and as it sank, the seas rushed in and overwhelmed it, causing more explosions as the water seeped into the volcanic pits.

When morning came—when Ra rose once more from the sea, redder even than on the evening before—he disclosed a steaming, smoking expanse of waves beneath a sky of crimson-tinted, billowing smoke. The Golden City alone stood intact. Here and there in the distance island peaks projected from the sea; and occasionally huge bubbles, miles in extent, would belch upward. The water was thick with mud, and the air was so filled with sulphur fumes as to be almost unbreathable.

Then the sun passed upward into the overhanging pall of smoke and the whole surface of the deep was plunged into night once more.

DURING the night and day and night of horror, Mayhew remained under guard. Food was brought him from time to time. Occa-

sionally he slept. But his captors refused to tell him any news of what was going on in the city.

On the second morning his double, Porto, was thrust, battered and bleeding, into his cell. It seems that Porto with some others of the army had fled to their ships when the eruption had started. The tidal wave had swept them close to the Golden City. There they had landed, to be immediately set upon by the forces of Tirio, whom they unexpectedly found to be in control. Porto and a few others had been captured. The rest scattered.

Later in the morning Mayhew and Porto were led out of the house, through the streets, and into the public square. The streets were nearly deserted, but the square was thronged with yellow men, thugs of Tirio, and a few miscellaneous Muians. Tirio sat in state on a golden throne, and by his side stood Eleria, her hands bound.

"The heavenly twins have come to see you, my dear," bantered Tirio, indicating Mayhew and Porto with a wave of his hand. "And now I have a proposition to put to you. You have declined the honor of becoming my queen. You have very bravely refused to yield to threats, and for that display of courage I love you all the more. So now I am going to buy your love, and at the same time get a little fun out of watching your choice. If you will agree to marry me peacefully and willingly, I will spare the life of one of your two friends. Which one shall it be?"

"You will spare him, in return for my promise?" asked the girl.

"Well, not exactly. But if you marry me, I give you my word of honor that he shall then go free. Which of the twins is it to be?"

"Honor?" contemptuously replied

Eleria. "You do not know what that word means."

The rat face went white, and Porto and Mayhew both smiled grimly.

"Wipe that grin off!" shrieked Tirio, and two attendants slapped them across their mouths.

Eleria then said conciliatingly, "I am sorry, Tirio, that I spoke so hastily, but I have suffered much and am not altogether responsible for what I say. Let me make you a counter proposition. Release both of them, and I will marry you gladly and willingly."

"No!" cried the two prisoners in unison, and Mayhew added, as his eye lighted on a small object on the ground in front of him, "We can take care of ourselves."

Tirio by this time had regained his composure.

"You think so?" he sneered. "And how do you propose to take care of yourself, Adamo Mayho?"

The crowd guffawed.

"If you weren't a coward, you'd come down off that throne and fight me," Mayhew replied. "I'll fight you with swords, at which you are reputed an expert. Or I'll fight you with my bare hands the way I did that day on the wharves over a year ago."

THERE were several snickers in the crowd, and Tirio stiffened.

Then he grinned diabolically. He knew how to turn this into a joke and thus appeal to his followers.

"I tell you what," he said. "Were it not for my duty to these men who have chosen me to rule over them, I would gladly risk my life to settle old scores with you on even terms. But I'll give you a chance. Fight me as you are, but with my having a sword, and let the winner take the girl. What say you?"

"I'll do it!" said the American with

surprising eagerness. "But what guarantee will you give that you will go through with the bargain if I win?"

Tirio was a bit taken back by this ready acceptance of his preposterous offer. But his confusion was covered up by Porto's asking: "Where do I come in on this?"

"Oh, if you wish, you can fight the winner," Tirio declaimed with an airy wave of the hand. "Well, let's get going."

"No! No!" begged Eleria. "Don't kill them. I'll marry you."

"You'll do that, anyway," asserted Tirio grimly. "On with the fight!"

He stepped down from his throne and began to draw his sword.

"Just a minute," hastily interposed Mayhew. "My sandal is untied."

Dropping to one knee, he tugged at the leather thong. It came loose. Then picking up something else, he arose to his feet.

Round and round his head Mayhew swung his right arm. Tirio stared, his sword half-drawn.

Mayhew's arm suddenly ceased its gyrations and lashed out toward his enemy. The leather thong fluttered from Mayhew's hand.

Tirio's sword clattered to the cobblestones and he slumped into a soundless heap, while blood streamed from a cut on his forehead. Mayhew's childhood practice with a sling, years ago in New Bedford, had not been in vain.

For a moment every one, including the victor, stood motionless. Then an angry growl broke from the crowd. But the sound was drowned in another growl, as the earth began to tremble and shake. A few bricks fell into the square. The surrounding buildings began to totter. Panic stricken, the crowd fled.

Mayhew snatched up Tirio's sword and cut Eleria's bonds, and the three friends hastened away.

The ground now heaved so that they could scarcely keep their feet. All about them buildings were crashing to earth. It was a miracle that they got out of the city alive.

At last they dragged themselves onto a little hill on the outskirts and gazed back at what was left of the once proud Golden City, now an indescribable chaos of fallen masonry, sprinkled with fires. But the fires were short-lived, for the city was settling fast, and even as the fugitives gazed, the sea swept in and engulfed it all.

The Golden City was no more.

Several hundred survivors occupied the hill, now an island, and among these survivors they found Julo and Marta. Then night fell.

IN the lurid red light of the volcanic morning, Julo instinctively took command of the little community. A small boat had drifted ashore in the night. It turned out to be equipped and provisioned.

Julo said, "Two of us must take this boat, search for the nearest undestroyed land, and send back help. And, even if help should fail to reach us, two of us will at least have been saved. Let us draw lots. The winner can choose his companion."

So the drawing was held, and Adams Mayhew won.

"I choose Eleria," he promptly said.

But she sadly shook her head as she replied, "No, Adamo dear. You are my very best friend in all the world; but, if you will forgive me, I will stay here with Porto, whom I love." And she put her hand through Porto's arm.

Mayhew gulped, then turning to Julo, asked, "Is the lot transferable?"

"I don't know why not?"

"Then I transfer it to my good friend, Porto, and to his bride."

So Porto and Eleria were duly married at high noon by the magistrate Julo, according to the ritual of Ra, and they set forth that same day in the little boat. A gentle wind bore them steadily westward and Adams Mayhew watched with aching heart until their boat was a mere speck on the horizon.

Long after all the others had left the shore and gone inland, Mayhew sat on the beach and stared moodily at the western horizon, which concealed his two friends. The tide rose, and he moved away from it. Then he noticed that the tide seemed to be rising with unusual speed.

Faster and faster came the waters. Mayhew left the shore and scrambled up the hill. And then it dawned on him that the trouble was not that the waters were rising. On the contrary, the land was settling!

Horried, he ran to warn his friends, though what good a warning would do them he did not stop to consider.

But the warning was never delivered. The land heaved, and cracked, and threw him to his knees. The sea reached in and engulfed him and swept him away, whirling him over and over, blinding and choking him. Madly he fought his way to the surface; and at last he made it, and lay there spitting and coughing and drawing deep breaths of air into his tortured lungs.

Then he looked around him. The island and all his friends were gone! He was alone in the midst of the Pacific Ocean!

But in the western distance there

rose from the horizon a thin column of smoke. This smoke steadily approached him, until he could see the steamer from which it emanated. The steamer bore down upon him. He waved and shouted. The steamer stopped and lowered a boat.

When he was safely aboard his first questions were in a strange tongue which no one could understand. Then some one asked him in English for his name.

He told them: "Adams Mayhew of the whaling barque Alaska."

"Shipwrecked?"

"No. Fell overboard."

"When?"

"September, 1891."

At which there were many significant glances, and one man exclaimed, "But, my dear fellow, this is 1932!"

"Where have you been all this while?" asked some one else sarcastically.

"On the continent of Mu," he replied with open-faced simplicity.

"Oh, you've been reading one of Col. Churchward's books. Mu was destroyed by earthquakes and sank beneath the waves *twenty-five thousand* years ago!"

Adams Mayhew had never heard of Churchward; but he deemed it best to keep the story of his adventure to himself, until he found a sympathetic listener in me.

THE END.

Coming Soon

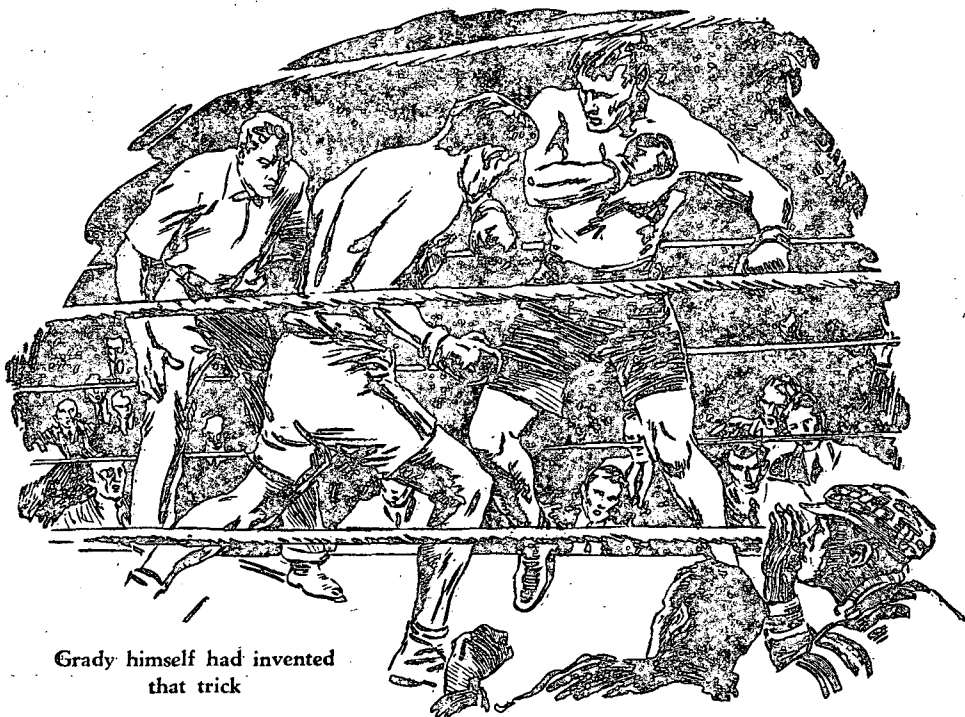
"The Finger of Doom," by Garret Smith; a science crime story. "World's End," by Victor Rousseau; in the Year of the Comet. "The Lost Land of Atzlan," by Fred MacIsaac; in a secret valley. "The Fire Planet," by Ray Cummings; a strange new world.

A Stork's Pride

IN the aviaries of Frank A. Vanderlip at Palos Verdes, near Los Angeles, a pair of cranes occupied a cage next to a solitary stork. In course of time the cranes decided to raise a family, so went about the business. A hole was scooped out in the ground for a nest, two eggs were laid, then mama and papa crane took turns at keeping them warm. The old stork took one look, forgot his dignity and got busy.

Mr. Stork scooped himself out a nest, then realizing he was not the kind of bird to lay eggs, he gathered a few nice pebbles and settled down for a hard spring. The cranes brought off their two fledglings and proudly dug worms for them from the moistened ground. The stork took a look and settled back on his stones with renewed determination, but alas—it was a forlorn cause. However, he still had confidence in his own ability when the keeper kindly removed him to another and distant cage.

F. Stanley Renshaw.



The Flaw

By EDMOND DU PERRIER

Champion Matt Grady was fighting two opponents—his age and the young boxer he'd coached

MATT GRADY'S manager, Lee Simmons, stared at the middleweight champion with horror-stricken eyes. It was a terrific shock—as if Matt Grady had gone violently insane.

"You're telling me you bet one hundred grand on *yourself*—to win!—At two to one!"

Matt Grady's kindly, tolerant eyes twinkled at the thin-faced, gray-haired manager. He lifted himself like a lazy lion from his reclining position on the hotel bed.

"I'm telling you, Lee," he said mild-

ly. "One hundred grand—on myself—at two to one. Very simple. It 'll mean three hundred grand for me. Out at five per cent—a neat little income for the rest of my life."

Lee Simmons flung up his hands. "You're crazy, Matt!" he wailed. "You should have bet on O'Brien. It ain't ethical, maybe, but it would have been common sense."

The veteran fighter smiled wistfully at the little manager. "So you've gone against me, too, Lee? You figure I'm—?"

"Well, ain't that right?" Lee Sim-

mons blurted out. "You know what every one's saying. You ain't so young any more."

"Yes, I know what every one's saying," Matt replied. "They're saying I'm forty years old—that I'm done. They're saying that Taxi O'Brien has everything I've got—and youth besides. The smart boys think that too—at two to one."

His voice rose in justifiable pride. "But remember," he pointed out, "I'm still the champion!"

"Champion—champion—yes—" Lee Simmons broke off, his tones full of dejection. "I—I—guess I'll go an' get a cigar," he stated, as if it were a matter of great importance.

"Go ahead," Matt grinned. "And you might as well see the chef about my steak while you're downstairs."

From the counter in the lobby Lee Simmons selected a cigar, and then sank into one of the red leather chairs facing the street, to meditate on Matt Grady's folly.

In six hours, his fading champion would enter the ring—with every penny he possessed bet upon himself. "It's criminal," Lee Simmons muttered. "There ought to be some way to stop him."

Ballyhoo had built this battle up into a tremendous thing. The news writers themselves had been captivated by what it promised. Their articles breathed sincerity, tempered generously with pathos. Matt Grady had been dearly loved. But every voice proclaimed that the champion was headed for defeat as surely as the setting of the sun.

It was inevitable—the reasons for it logical, as they saw it. Primarily, it was the ancient struggle of youth against age. Matt Grady, at forty was well beyond a fighter's prime. His

physical perfection was gone—only his extraordinary cleverness remained. On the other hand, Matt's opponent, Taxi O'Brien, had the glorious physical endowment of sturdy youth—with all of Matt Grady's famous cleverness as well. For by a queer twist of circumstance it was master and pupil who were about to contend for the throne.

Four years before, this slim youth had been Matt Grady's constant companion. Matt Grady had seen great promise in the boy. He had, with the bigness of his heart, delighted in cramming the boy's head with his special knowledge—the bag of Grady fighting tricks which had brought him to the crest. That bag of tricks was a peculiar pattern of weave and feint and shift. It prepared an opponent for the knock-out just as in bull fighting the *banderillos* which a *matador* places in the massive neck muscles of a bull brings his head down for the final thrust.

Therefore, the coming battle was slated as a classic duel of the ring, but with Youth the final arbiter. Only one voice rose in the champion's behalf—his own!

Lee Simmons shook his head sorrowfully. This fight had been to recoup both their broken fortunes. If Matt lost, he would never accept a cent of charity. He would fight again. And at his age, with the shadow of defeat upon him, the road down would lead swiftly to the end.

That would be, perhaps, a mild form of insanity—the kind in which the victim is usually described as punch-drunk!

It was not a pleasant picture to contemplate. Lee Simmons shuddered and rose. "If it was anybody but Taxi O'Brien!" he muttered mournfully.

But he knew the prideful heart of champions. Matt Grady would never

accept defeat until its dark waters had actually closed over his head.

IT was ten o'clock when the preliminaries to the championship bout were over. Matt Grady lay back in his corner; stared past the Kliegs to the star-studded sky. Something had gone wrong with the gong, and he used this respite for a moment of complete relaxation. His years in the ring had left few marks upon him beyond the inevitable etching of scars around the lips and eyes.

In the other corner, Taxi O'Brien, a tall, well-muscled boy, with the satiny, beautifully burnished skin of well-trained youth, danced nervously.

A moment later the referee nodded, the gong rang. Lee Simmons spoke to Matt, and then dropped to the floor, his eyes haggard. Matt's pride would be his own defeat, as Lee saw it; the gambling wolves would howl with mirth, and they would send him on his way—broke. But the fight was on now—nothing could be done.

The first round might not have pleased those who prefer brute punishment. Feint and parry, weave and shift, were as deft as swordsmanship. And both fighters were fighting in much the same style. It was a beautiful picture, and the crowd was tolerant. They expected a long fight. It would be later, when the minute rests between rounds would be insufficient to let the aging Matt recuperate, yet would be the boon of Hercules to young O'Brien, that the bitterest struggle would come.

"How's it going?" Lee asked, after the first round.

"It's all sewed up," Matt said.

The little manager shook his head sorrowfully.

Matt started the second round lead-

ing the fight. He bored in with a quick, deceptive shuffle which brought his right hand into sudden play, raining a quick succession of blows about his opponent's face, then aiming a blow to the heart. It was one of his famous tricks, but O'Brien, knowing it thoroughly, merely laughed at him. He used the only possible defense—the one Matt Grady had invented.

Then O'Brien danced back, and came in again, using the same deceptive shuffle, following it up quickly with that swift right-hand play. He was grinning—as if to show that he knew how to beat the master at his own game.

But as the younger fighter made that lightning shift, aiming the blow for the face and then pulling back his arm for that big punch to the heart, Matt's left snaked out too fast for the eye to follow and rapped O'Brien on the nose. It was scarcely more than a shove, but the youngster, his right drawn back for his climaxing blow, was set completely off his balance. He was sprawled wide open, and looked the veriest novice. An excited cry rose from the thousands outside the ring.

Matt acted—brutally, accurately! His left hand drove like a bullet, wrist-deep in Taxi's body. His right fist thudded cruelly under the heart. Taxi's hands dropped; his jaw hung slack. Matt did not pause an instant. With devastating precision, he drove right and left to the exposed chin; and as Taxi began to slump, he shot a final blow. Then he turned and walked quietly to a neutral corner.

BUT how?" Lee Simmons demanded, when at last they had escaped the pandemonium of the arena and the host of sudden friends who had besieged them.

Matt's eyes twinkled tolerantly. "That fight was won four years ago, when I trained that boy. He was—and is—the stuff of which champions are made. He'll be champ now. For I'm through—I'm retiring undefeated."

"But did you—?"

"Yes. I tricked him. I forced him into using that shift. That winning shift. He knew how to use it—and use it fast. He knew how to defend himself when I used it." He laughed gently. "I've always felt this boy and I would meet some day. You all felt that. And you laughed at me when I taught the boy all I knew. I was a fool, you said. Okay. I built him into a champion—on that trick shift."

He laughed again. "But I didn't tell him there was a flaw in that shift. I knew it when I invented it. I couldn't

get rid of it. When you slip into that last big blow to the heart, there's a split second when the slightest touch will send you off balance. It's curtains, if the other fellow's able to hit at that instant. And I could always hit!"

Lee nodded. "You were always smarter'n—"

"Never mind the bouquets!" Matt cut in. "First thing in the morning, get ahold of that kid and tell him I want to see him."

"What for?" Simmons asked, astonished.

Matt's eyes shone. "I want to complete his education," he said. "Some day—maybe six or seven years from now—they'll be saying the same things about him that they did about me. And he'll like to know about that little flaw."

THE END.



Hungarian Saddles

THE *csikos*, the horse herders of the Hungarian plains and steppes, are a proud race and consider themselves above the cattlemen and shepherds.

They are most picturesque, astride their magnificent and hardy horses, with their round black hats tilted over their eyes, top boots and great cloaks of soft white felt-like tissue; which have wide embroidered sleeves always hanging loose and sewn up for use as pockets.

They ride so well that they seem almost one with their mounts; when they round their herds they gallop at break-neck pace, their long whips crackling like pistol shots, and they do not slacken their gait even when storms or the darkness of the night render the treacherous pitfalls of the steppes particularly dangerous.

Their saddles are not strapped to the horses with any girth. As a matter of fact, rather than saddles in the orthodox sense of the word, they are pieces of padded cloth about one inch thick with leather stirrups hanging from the sides. But, under the sinewy thighs of the *csikos*, they seem glued to the horses' backs.

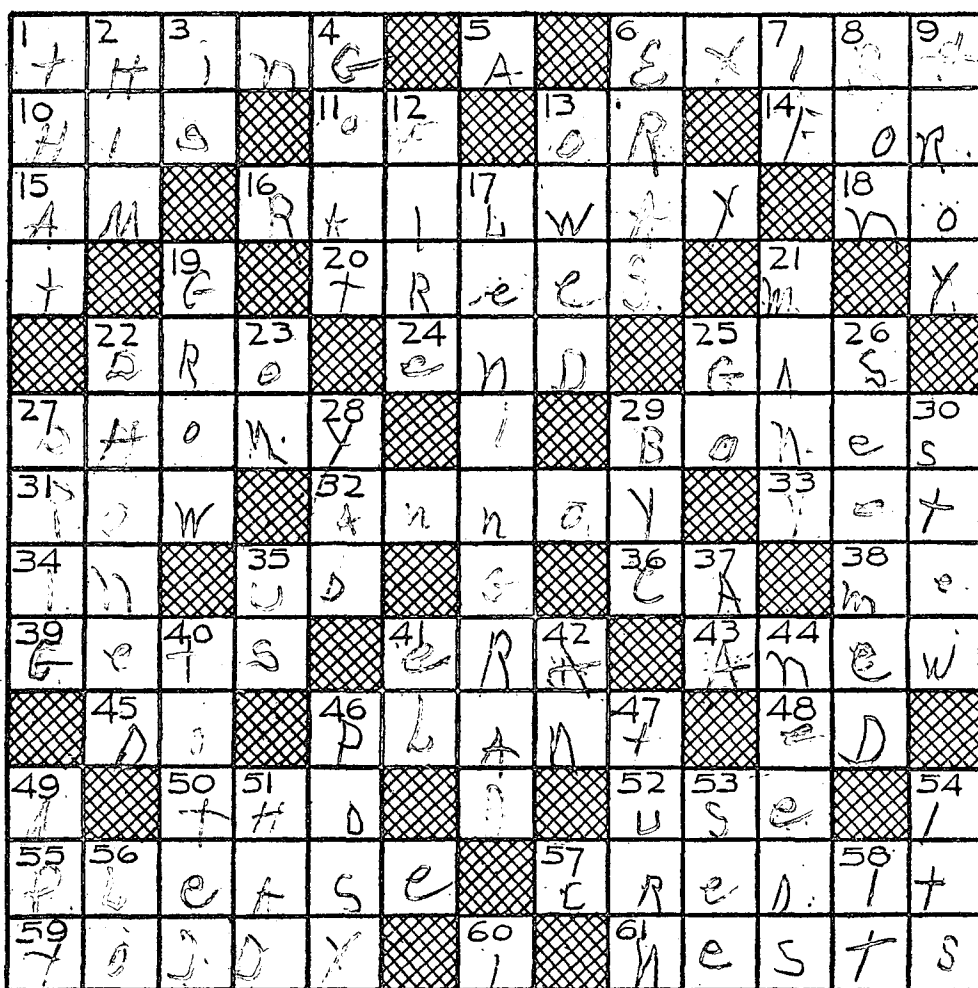
These loose seats enable the *csikos* to get clear in the nick of time and out of the path of their wildly galloping herds when their mounts stumble and fall; but it is a matter of conjecture if many other riders besides *csikos* could go through a series of gallops and jumps astride a *csiko* saddle.

Armand Brigaud.

Narrative Cross-Word Puzzle

BURGLARY

By Richard Hoadley Tingley



A—Across

- A 48 "It's a risky job, Boris, and no mistake," objected. *C.P.*
 A 59 Petroff as he and his pal sipped their hot *T.C.A.* in the back room of the hotel, "and the older *I.C.* the more cautious I become. There are not *M.*... men in our line who would dare tackle it in this reform *R.R.* with a record of their finger-

A 34

A 61

A 46

D 41 D 13

D 44

D 58

D 6

D—Down

prints *W.* every city. We should have feathered our *M.* from the haul we made at that canning *P.A.* just outside Paso last year. We it to ourselves, for we had plenty of money then, enough to satisfy our for years, but we spent *P.T.* like a couple of drunken sailors. Not in
 140

A 27 shall we have such another chance. I feel like giving up this
A 14 business of ours and
A 39 going straight ~~F.A.~~ keeps. It
D 47 D 25 ~~person~~ on my nerves. I'd like
D 17 to ~~take~~ a new leaf, ...
A 43 back to my old home in
A 33 and begin life while
D 27 there is ~~just~~ time."
"Now don't be a ~~big~~
Petroff," retorted Boris. "I gave
A 57 you for more backbone.
A 52 What's the of croaking
D 30 and getting into a ~~big~~ about
D 4 it? You get my ~~heart~~ with
D 49 your preaching. We aren't ~~happy~~
D 7 to get into trouble we are
careful. I've been over this
A 1 A 22 ~~thing~~ from all angles, ...
and ~~on~~, time and again. We
A 60 can't fail, and make no
A 29 of telling you that I
D 28 won't stand another ~~minute~~ out
A 13 of you ~~and~~. I'll get some one
else to help me. You aren't the
D 40 only man who has ~~done~~ a gun
successfully with me."
A 55 "Well, just as you"
reluctantly agreed Petroff. "I
A 31 don't want any with you:
A 50(cont.) D 26 it has to me
D 35 that chances were against ~~me~~,
A 15 but I with you if you
A 45 insist and will as you
say, for, after all, one must
A 6"
D 53 "Glad to ~~see~~ you are
coming to your senses," replied
Boris, somewhat appeased.
A 10 "Now listen," and he told ~~me~~
chum how Andrews was the
D 9 richest man in ~~the city~~ that he
D 42 had made ~~a~~ enormous fortune
in the collar business;
D 1 Andrews's butler had told
D 2 his employer always kept
D 23 thousands of dollars ~~in~~ his
person or in the house, and that
D 8 he and his lived there
D 29 alone. "Bye and" he
continued, "soon after midnight,
we'll pay him a visit and that
D 3 cash will be ours. that

interesting, ... Petroff?"
Leaving the electric ~~light~~
line at a corner near a ~~gas~~
station in the dead ~~of~~ night
the two crooks lost ~~the~~ time
in reaching the house.

"Looks good to ~~me~~!" ex-
claimed Boris. "Not ~~at~~ light.
D 54(cont.) Not a sound. ~~Yes~~ a cinch,
my boy!"

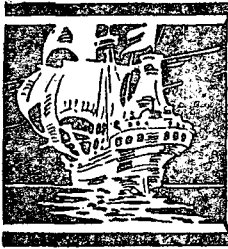
Dodging behind ~~the~~ and
ruthlessly trampling over
beds they reached the house,
jimmied a window and crawled
in. and behold, the
house was empty! Andrews had
sold the place and moved
out the day before!

But a man at the
station nearby saw the burglars
enter, ... the police, and
Sergeant Dunn was on the job
in no time.

".....!" sarcastically ex-
claimed the officer who greeted
the crooks as they clambered
out of the window. "I hate to
..... you boys when you are
having such a good time, but the
jig is You've come to
the of your rope! You're
pinched!"

ANSWER TO LAST WEEK'S PUZZLE

D	O		P	O	L	I	T	I	C		A	T
O	U	T		F	I	N	I	S		S	I	R
W	R	E	N		E	V	E		S	O	R	E
N		N	O	T		E		J	O	B		E
	R	O	W		A	S	S		T	E	N	
B	A	R		T	I	T	A	N		R	A	N
U	P		L	I	M	I	T	E	D		P	A
L		D	I	N		G		W	I	N		M
L	O	O	T		S	A	Y		G	A	M	E
	I	N		W	A	T	E	R		B	E	
A	L		W		W	I	T		I		T	O
R	E	N	E	W		N		O	F	T	E	N
E	D		B	E	G	G	A	R	S		R	E



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



THE Crusades actually saw fire used as a war weapon:

It may surprise the reader to learn that the medieval men-at-arms were familiar with combustibles and employed fire as a weapon against the enemy. The so-called "Greek Fire"—a searing blaze shot through a tube—was used by the armies of Byzantium, and proved an appalling mystery to the Crusaders from the West who saw it for the first time. The chemists of the day concocted gaseous substances that could be ignited and pumped from containers, and war-galleys were built with ingenious equipment able to spout flaming oil and naphtha. Often the soldiers hurled fire-bombs at men assaulting their wall. Mangonels were constructed to throw sealed containers that would burst into flame when they broke. Alchemists thus experimenting a thousand years or so ago were paving the way for Big Berthas and the modern "liquid fire."

Too, the armies of the Dark Ages had their engineers who put together a great variety of machines called *gyms*. Catapults for the hurling of great stones. Machines to hurl darts. Huge rams that could be swung to batter against giant gates. They had their artillery and their sappers.

The hospital corps of the day was most primitive. The knights were more interested in killing than in saving the wounded. There was no such organization as the Red Cross and medicine had become a lost art. However, the women and the priests who traveled with the armies labored bravely among the sick and wounded, who in some cases were isolated in sick-camps.

The author is aware that Antioch did not fall to the Crusaders as described in "Crescent and Cross." The undermining and firing of the Bridge Gate is wholly fictitious, as are most of the characters in the story. The action in the story takes place in that epoch historians call The First Crusade, the year 1098 A. D.

THEODORE ROSCOE.

NATIONAL Guard voted eight to one:

Myrtle Point, Ore.

While working as assistant night caretaker in the Oakland, California, Armory, I found that the various members of the twelve companies

and batteries, comprising some 1,000 officers and enlisted men, who have headquarters in the building, were finding it hard to pass the time before and after drills pleasantly. It was true that three pool and three card tables were always constantly in use in the club rooms; but only a small percentage of the fellows could gather about these at one time.

I made arrangements with a newsdealer near the Armory to hold a copy of certain magazines for me each time current issues were placed on the stands; and foremost in my selection came four copies weekly of *ARGOSY*, I having been for nineteen years an ardent reader and admirer.

The Guardsmen were delighted with the new magazines, but *ARGOSY* was going out eight times to any of the other magazines' once. Pretty sound proof of which magazine was the most interesting, I think. Since the Armory in Berkeley, the Armory in Alameda, and the Armory in Richmond all took a tip from what I was doing, and installed reading sections to their club rooms, you can readily understand how many Guardsmen read and enjoy *ARGOSY*.

ROBERT BRUCE MACLAINE.

WISHES there weren't so many serials:

New Britain, Conn.

I like most all the stories, but wish there weren't so many serials. My favorite authors are Dunn, Worts, Bedford-Jones, MacIsaac.

In the April 1 issue, "The Hour of Fury," by Ernest Haycox, and "Full Payment," by G. H. Cox, are two stories that it would be pretty hard to beat. Here's hoping you can continue to keep *ARGOSY* depression-proof.

G. M. FLETCHER.

MURDER in the living room:

Weatherford, Texas.

The Lone Star State has not been represented in your letter file lately, so perhaps this will remedy matters. I live in West Texas, though not the real West, since my homeplace is just thirty miles west of where the West begins.

The *ARGOSY* is okay from my viewpoint, and I intend to keep on reading it till my finances run out. Then longer if Dame Fortune smiles on me with another job, because a ten year habit

is hard to break, especially when it is such a pleasant one.

Would like to have some stories about South Africa and Australia, have some relatives there and am curious about their customs and countries.

May I offer a suggestion—please ask Mr. Paul Stahr to make one or two of his picture covers not quite so sanguinary. I have been wanting to send for an ARGOSY cover reproduction, but have not done so, because it is to be framed and it would be shocking, to say the least, to look up and see a murder being committed or about to be committed right in the living room.

Thanks for hours and hours of enjoyment.

MARGARET WALDOCK.

WE should have said it was Roscoe's first *book-length* novel . . . R. V. Gery is *not* Guy Gilpatric, nor vice versa—glad you like 'em both:

Atlanta, Ga.

Where d'ye get this stuff about "The Kingdom of Hell" being Roscoe's first novel for ARGOSY? Ever heard tell of "Bentfinger," the four-part item of summer '31? Tut tut and other exclamations of reproof.

Furthermore, if R. V. Gery and Guy Gilpatric of the *Saturday Evening Post* Inchcliffe Castle (Steamship) stories isn't one and the same person, this is a very indiscriminating reader. The "Noah's Ark" story was very amusing, ranking almost with the one some time back (title unrecalled) about the rotten-egg dumping scow and its hilarious contest between a time-clause contract and human olfactory endurance.

J. Allan Dunn is at his very best in "The Fourth Compadre." He parts from a certain artificiality of style that mars some of his work. This gives one the real illusion of presence in a tropic clime. Max Brand's "The Masterman" isn't quite up to the "The Longhorn Feud." Perhaps it followed too close. Worts's "Decoy" was quite a strain; am glad it's over, but wouldn't have missed it.

C. KESSLER.

SATIRE:

Madison, Wis.

I have read nearly every story published by Edgar Rice Burroughs and enjoy his subtle satire on modern society and customs as well as his vivid imaginary description. Otis A. Kline is a close second best; he has the imagination but not the satire.

The recent stories that I liked best are "The Longhorn Feud," "The Pirates of Venus," "Land of Painted Rocks," "A Swordsman of Mars," "The Decoy," "The Masterman," "The Fourth Compadre," etc., etc.

I always have enjoyed and look forward to stories of *Zorro*.

I consider ARGOSY the best balanced magazine which I have read. (That covers a lot of territory, for I have read at one time or another nearly every popular magazine.)

A. B. McVICAR.

MAX BRAND'S stories in ARGOSY dispel a prejudice:

Hollywood, Calif.

Hitherto I have not read Max Brand, but the cover intrigued me and I then began to find out what I had been missing. It's funny what prejudice will do. I also enjoy *Terry Kilroe*, *Jimmie Cordie*, *Peter the Brazen*, etc. My favorite authors are Edgar Rice Burroughs, O. A. Kline, H. Bedford-Jones, Worts, and others too numerous to mention. When do we get another story from Farley?

CHARLES STEERE.

MORE dog and lumber stories:

Cincinnati, Ohio.

I have only been reading ARGOSY for about two and a half months and I think it is the best magazine on the market. Here's a boost for Fred MacIsaac's "Tyrant of Technocracy," also Gardner's "Law of the Rope." "Death Dog" was a very good story. Let's have more dog and lumber stories. Also some more good stories of desert-wise *Bob Zane*. I do and always will love the ARGOSY. I wish you as much success during the next fifty years as during the past fifty.

JOHN W. MEYER.

A POET'S hobbies (as related in O. O. McIntyre's column "New York Day by Day"):

The shyest of all distinguished American writers is Edwin Arlington Robinson. A poet and notable contributor to the Arthurian Legend of English literature, although a Down East Yankee from Head Tide, Maine . . . he runs from interviews and publicity of all sorts. His amusements are billiards, an occasional symphony at Carnegie and, oddly enough, reading the ARGOSY magazine.

IT took a train wreck—

Quincy, Ill.

We have been reading ARGOSY ever since I remember, and the only time we ever missed one was when a train accident destroyed the consignment for our section. We certainly missed this one issue, and hope we don't miss any more.

RUTH E. DERBY.

A LONG novelette of lawyer *Hazeltine*, "Where There's a Will," appears July 1st:

Elizabethtown, Ky.

"The Decoy" is one of the best stories that I have ever read, and I wish that *Hazeltine* would appear in a story every issue. I also like *Peter the Brazen*, *Bob Zane*, *Jimmie Cordie*. Mason's Legion stories are always good. "The Hour of Fury" is the best Western story that I have read for a long time.

JOSEPH FOOTE, JR.

LIKES puzzles:

East Dedham, Mass.

The best authors in your magazine are Edgar Rice Burroughs (how about another *Tarzan* story?), W. Wirt, F. V. W. Mason and Theodore Roscoe. All your good authors are serial or novelette writers. How about some good short story writers? The cover designs are very good, especially Paul Stahr's.

The best stories lately were "Zorro Hunts a Jackal," "The Masterman," and "Lost on Venus."

The "Narrative Cross-word" puzzles are swell and I like Stookie Allen's page, too.

THOMAS HEVORY.

YOUR VOTE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

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2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Name _____

Street _____

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6-17



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By Garret Smith

The High Sign

FISH and HORACE, airplane salesmen, try sky-advertising with amazing results. A hilarious short story.

By Eustace L. Adams

TEN VARIED STORIES IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—JUNE 24th

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29x5.25-18	2.65	1.35	34x4	2.95	1.15
29x5.25-19	2.75	1.15	30x6	3.25	1.50
31x5.25-20	2.75	1.15	30x6	3.25	1.50
31x5.25-21	2.95	1.15	32x6	3.25	1.50
29x5.50-18	2.95	1.35			
29x5.50-19	2.95	1.35			
30x5.00-18	2.95	1.15			
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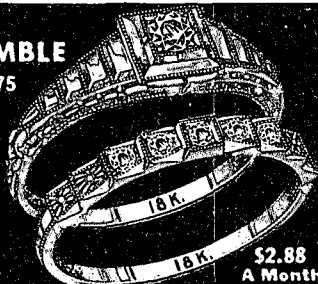


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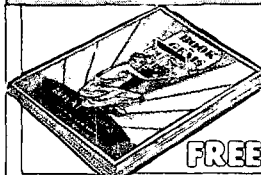
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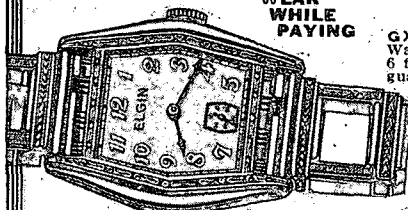
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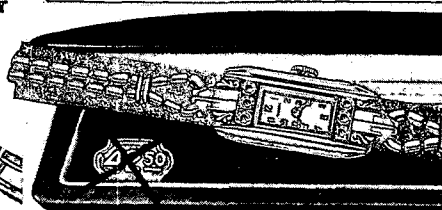
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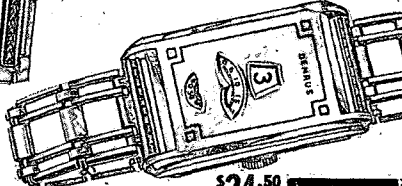


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